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OR, THE Doom of the Red-Death.

BY BURKE BRENTFORD,
AUTHOR OF "THE CRUISE OF THE SEA SPRITE."

CHAPTER I. IN MID-SEA.

TWILIGHT, in the wake of a superb semi-tropical sunset, setting down over the mid-sea, and over a tragedy too common in the adventurous days of which we write—early in 1777.

A young sailor, with pinioned arms, was about undergoing that barbarous penalty, "walking the plank," from the side of a pirate ship.

But in this instance there was an unusual saving clause, of which the victim might take advantage if he chose.

"Jack Bobstay," called the stern voice of the pirate commander, from among the motley crew gathered about the ship-end of the fatal

"IT IS FOR THE LAST TIME!" CALLED OUT REDBEARD, THE CORSAIR COMMANDER,
"WILL YOU OR WILL YOU NOT REVEAL YOUR TRUE NAME?"

plank, "the chance of life is still yours if you will take it."

A shake of the head, together with a contemptuous look, in response from the pale but dauntless victim—a stalwart, singularly handsome young sailor, of twenty-two or three—at the outer end that overhung the slightly-heaving, shark-infested sea.

"It is for the last time!" called out Redbeard, the corsair commander, once again. "Will you or will you not reveal your true name, or reveal the identity of the young girl once known as Aileen, the god-daughter of the Maid of Montauk?"

"Go on with your work, blood-stained pirate that you are!" was the fearless response. "To your first question I can return no answer; to your second I will not."

With a gesture of rage, Redbeard made the fatal sign, when, instantly, up went the ship end of the plank, down went the other end, and Jack Bobstay dropped into the sea with a splash.

"He's done for!" moodily growled the captain of the Black Death, with a passing glance down over the side where a hundred sharks were already lashing the water over the spot at which the victim had disappeared.

"Rapino," turning to his first mate, "crack on some more sail. There's a breeze stirring, and somehow I smell a prize."

"But wait, *comandero!*" cried the mate, who, with many others, was eagerly studying the water. "There is no blood yet, but only the red of the sunset, playing on the foam."

"No matter; it is impossible that he can have escaped the sharks. Obey orders!"

The mate at once shouted the order, and the crew obeyed with nimble readiness, for the slightest word of Redbeard was iron law on that deck.

As Redbeard turned toward the companionway, a woman, or young girl, of striking beauty, though pale and breathless with excitement, sprung up out of the opening, partly pursued by a negress, who came to a pause at the top of the steps, however, with a frightened, protesting look, as if to say:

"You see I can't prevent it, captain; she will have her way!"

"Speak, Redbeard!" exclaimed the young beauty, fearlessly grasping the captain's arm; "where is the young American of the ridiculous name? You have not dared—?"

Then, as she caught the expression of his face, together with more positive indications of the tragedy that had just been enacted, she recoiled, clutching at her breast as if in search for a pistol or poniard, her eyes blazing, her loosened black hair floating out in the warm soft wind.

Redbeard threw his arm around her, while giving the negress a look that sent her trembling down the steps.

"Peace, Carletta, and come with me!" he replied, with a strange mixture of kindness or indulgence in his voice and manner. "Of course the youth is done for, for when have I spared a traitor or an enemy? Not another word!"

And, in spite of her resistance, he bore her away with him.

But Jack Bobstay was not "done for." The splash of his plunge into the waves had momentarily scared away the sharks—the most cowardly no less than the most ravenous of sea-monsters—while, at the same moment, unperceived by any of the eyes bent over the bulwarks, a tempting mass of offal opportunely thrown out of the galley port served to at once divert their attention.

Then, as the dazed youth came to the surface close under the ship's bow, he found himself suddenly seized by the hair, and dragged up through the galley port into the cook-room.

His rescuer, a negro of herculean frame, who was the only other occupant of the place, quietly stood the dripping young man up against one of the caddies, and with a single stroke of a knife relieved his pinioned arms.

"Pambo—good, faithful Pambo!" exclaimed Jack, fervently; "what do I not owe to you?"

"And what has I owed to you, Marse Bobstay?" replied the negro, with a grin. "But be spry. Into dat big locker wid yer, Marse Jack, till supper am ober, an' den you an' me kin talk t'ings ober."

As he spoke, he opened a huge locker or closet, and, as the other hurried into it, secured the door upon him.

It was not too soon.

A moment later, Jarva, the captain's Malay steward—a tall, lean, serpentine rascal, with a yellow, parchment face—came grumbling into the caboose to know why his master's supper wasn't ready; after which sundry of the minor officers made their appearance on a similar quest of inquiry on their own account.

Pambo, the cook, replied good-naturedly to all, and then busied himself between the cook-room proper and the galley fire directly adjoining, where his two assistants, likely young negroes, were hard at work among the pans and kettles.

"It's coming on to blow mighty sudden," observed one of the new-comers, steadying himself against a lurch of the ship. "Jarva, I

wonder if Captain Redbeard will have any better appetite for knowing that the mysterious young American is at last among the sharks?"

"Who knows?" replied the Malay, in his peculiar pigeon-English, which is unproduced. "But little Carletta may make it hot for the captain."

"The young duffer should have been chucked to the sharks long ago," growled a black-bearded fellow, with a tinge of Spanish in his English—which was the official vernacular on board the Black Death, so to speak, though her commander was supposed to be of either French or Norse origin, while it was pretty certain that he came of a long buccaneering ancestry from way back in the days of Kidd and Morgan. "Our luck hasn't been worth a rap since we picked him up from that life-raft, a month ago."

"Too good a man for sharks' food, though—that is, if he wasn't a traitor in disguise, as Redbeard swore he was," commented yet another. "By the way, what was the secret of Carletta's fondness for the boy?"

"And Redbeard's indulgence, too?" cried the first speaker. "You heard those last words of our captain to him about a real name and the identity of some girl at Montauk? What could it all mean?"

"Ask Pambo," interposed Jarva. "He must have met the young chap somewhere before, and ought to know."

"Nebber in my born days!" replied the cook, speaking for himself with his accustomed grin, while heading his assistants as the bearers of smoking covered dishes that sent forth a savory odor. "De cabin grub am ready, Marse Steward. Cl'ar outen my caboose, you sailormen, eff you 'spects any grub in de fo'castle!"

In a few minutes the cook-room was cleared, and then for a brief space all was silent to the anxious concealed man, while the pitching of the vessel continued to increase, accompanied by the shrieking of the wind.

Then Pambo's heavy barefooted tread was heard once more, the locker was opened, and Jack was told to come out in a low voice, and with some excitement of manner.

"Hurry, Marse Jack!" exclaimed the cook. "De luck am in your favor. Koko, dat de'f-an'-dumb nig, jes' tumbled oberboard, an' nobody see him swep' out but me. Hurry in dere, an' brack up your face an' han's wid pot-grease. You kin take de pore boy's place."

"Oho! a good idea," said Jack, stretching himself after his brief confinement, in which he had none the less been half stifled. "All right, Pambo. And what a lucky thing for me, too, that Koko was deaf and dumb, poor devil! which will render the job of counterfeiting him so much the easier."

With Pambo's assistance the transformation was speedily accomplished, and it was complete enough to deceive any chance observation.

"How much of a blow is it?" demanded the youth, surveying his Africanization in a little hand-mirror with a chuckle of satisfaction.

"It am only de trade-win', dat will soon quiet down an' come steady," was the reply. "But be keeful, Marse Jack, for God's sake, an' don't furgit dat you am deaf an' dumb, or de shark will hab you dead suah, de nex' time."

"Trust me for that. But, look you, to-night will be a good time for us to get off in the long boat, if you can manage it."

"I'll see what kin be did, Marse Jack. Heah, help yourself to some ob dis fish stew, fur you mus' be hungry. You see," while the youth went to eating with no little gusto, "we c'd manage it fu'st rate if you weren't so set on takin' de captain's niece along wid us."

"Come what may, Carletta sha'n't be left behind. But leave that to me. If we can't manage the trick to-night, we must wait for a better one. Is the long boat still trailing aft, so that we will have no trouble in getting off in her?"

"Yes, she's dar yet."

"And you can have water, provisions, and everything else we would require, in readiness?"

"All ready, Marse Jack."

"Good! What's to prevent our slipping off at the first opportunity, then, after pulling out those big plugs in the Black Death's bottom that will soon send her reeling into the sea-depths, together with every blood-stained villain in her ship's company? Though we must try to fetch off the Shinnecock cabin-boy with us, together with Carletta. Matanko is too good a boy to be sent down in such company."

The cook raised his hand warningly, and, the next instant, Zambo, his remaining assistant, followed by Jarva, the steward, came in, the former with his head bleeding from a deep gash across the brow.

"The captain wants Koko to wait on his table," said Jarva, with a scowl. "I suppose it's because he can't hear what is said. He has already kicked Matanko out of the saloon, and look at the cut Zambo has got from the goblet that was thrown at his head!"

CHAPTER II.

THE CABIN MUTE.

At a sign from Pambo, the disguised young

sailor nodded understandingly, and silently quitted the caboose.

With a glance at the weather as he passed aft to the companionway, he saw that the night was scarcely as propitious, as he had hoped, for his contemplated escape in the long boat; for though the wind was blowing a half-gale, before which the ship was running for the south-east under close-hauled topsails and top-gallants, with a fairly heavy sea on, which in themselves were favorable enough conditions for the attempt, the full moon was newly risen in a cloudless sky, which was dead against the secrecy that would be required.

Obsequiously entering the cabin saloon, where the pirate captain and the young woman, his reputed niece, Carletta, were alone seated at table, Dirkman, the first mate, a Welsh adventurer, who was alone of the ship's company permitted to share the cabin accommodations on terms of comparative equality, having made his excuses a few moments before, the pretended Koko at once began to clear away some dishes with nimble, silent dispatch, after which he uncorked and placed at the skipper's elbow a fresh bottle of what he knew to be his favorite wine.

"So!" muttered Redbeard, filling his fair companion's glass and his own. "This is something like. By Jupiter, 'Letta,' to the young girl, 'I've a notion to deafen and cut out the tongues of a lot of boys, to have them in training for my cabin service! Or, how would it do to take Koko here from the caboose permanently for our use?'"

Carletta was a singularly beautiful maiden of seventeen or thereabouts, a Spanish-appearing young beauty, dressed in a rich brocade gown and with a profusion of jeweled ornaments that was little short of barbaric. She was pale and *distracted*, but looked up quickly, on being thus addressed, with a forced indifference in her exquisitely-chiseled features.

"I hate negroes when they're as jet-black as Koko is," she replied, half-sullenly. "Besides, Papa Redbeard," with a forced laugh, "you'd have to lay in a ship's-load of apprentices to keep up your supply, I'm thinking. You've half-killed Zambo to-night, and crippled the Indian boy; while I wonder if you've ever kept account of the number you've killed outright or maimed beyond recovery in your fiendish tempers before tossing them to the sharks?" And, as she said this, a slight shudder, which was fortunately not noticed by Redbeard, convulsed her frame.

He burst into a laugh, and once more drained his goblet.

"Ha, ha, ha! that have I not," he laughed, boisterously. "By my faith, it is too good fun to strike down right and left at one's pleasure, without keeping score. What say you, boy?" turning to the pretended Koko in momentary forgetfulness of his supposed infirmity; "could you be no less useful to me in the cabin here than with big Pambo in the caboose?"

"It's likely that this wretch could get along with Jarva, your Malay snake of a steward, any better than the rest of them do!" sneered the young woman. "Besides, do you forget, Papa Redbeard, that this fellow cannot hear a word you say?"

"Ha! but he can see what I say, Letta. Look!" the seeming Koko, while apparently not hearing a word, was bending forward eagerly, his glistening eyes fastened intently upon the speaker's lips. "I've heard tell of this intelligence in deaf mutes before now. And as for Jarva," the pirate moved a little restlessly in his seat, for, if the truth were told, he secretly feared his snake-like steward not a little; "I'll cut that cock's comb for him some day when he least expects it. Did you understand my question, boy?"

Jack at once went through a series of pantomime more or less grotesquely expressive of the ecstasy it would cause him to be more intimately attached to his questioner's person.

"You see?" cried the pirate, turning triumphantly to the girl, while Jack unconcernedly went on busying himself in various little useful duties about the saloon. "However, I'd better turn the matter over in my mind. If the chap could only be deaf now, without being dumb, what a treasure he would be, eh?"

Carletta, after a good long look at the counterfeit Koko, had already discovered the true character beneath the disguise, and suddenly brightened up amazingly, though she was on her guard.

"Better take him as he is, I suppose," she replied, indifferently; while "Koko," having remarked her glance, and after setting out a fresh bottle on the table, busied himself with arranging the cups and decanters on an adjoining buffet. "But, enough of this, Papa Redbeard, if you please!"

"You don't drink your wine, Letta!" grumbled the chief, his ill-humor partly returning. "The very best Amontillado out of that last Portuguese brig we rifled, too!"

"I don't care for it," crossly.

"Something vexes you, though. Still grieving over that fair-faced young traitor I tossed to the sharks, eh?"

"Let that go!" with a sudden hardening of

her tone. "But it was not proved that Jack Bobstay was meditating treachery to you, for all that."

"Proof enough for me. How else should he have borne such a likeness to my arch-enemy, the Maid of Montauk, otherwise the Smuggler Queen?"

"Pish! And could he have contrived to be the sole survivor of that life-raft simply on the chance of being picked up by you, that he might devise your ruin, pray? Preposterous, Papa Redbeard!"

"Perhaps so, though luck might have that far aided him. At all events, I never believed his story of the wreck of the Sally Ann, of Sag Harbor. Far more likely that he procured himself to be set adrift from that swift schooner that so mysteriously eluded us the day before, and just on purpose to have me pick him up."

"But to what purpose?"

"How should I know? Like enough in the Smuggler Queen's interest. Besides, he and Pambo, our black cook, had somehow met before, and were very friendly. Jarva found out that much for me at the outset. And you know, as well as I do, the suspicious way in which Pambo came into my service less than six months ago."

"Granted. But why not throw him to the sharks, then, instead of the young sailor?"

"Pambo is too valuable to be spared," dryly.

"I am something of a gourmand, as you know, my dear," with a wave of the hand at the table, with its burden of rare viands and rich treasures of gold and silver plate, the spoils of many a plundered craft, whose unfortunate inmates were no more, "and where would I get such another cook as Pambo, who, moreover, seems discreet enough, for all that Jarva or my other spies have been able to discover to the contrary. But, enough of this! The finding of Aileen's miniature in the boy's possession was sufficient to stamp him as being secretly connected with my accursed American foes. Besides, did I not give him a fair last chance to explain away my suspicions?"

"I don't know," thoughtfully. "Did you?"

"I'll swear it, Carletta!" earnestly. "Ask any of the crew!"

"And he chose the shark's jaws, rather than unseal his lips!"

"Just that! Curse the youth! there was no denying his bravery, at all events. He'd have made a master-pirate, if I could only have trusted him. And no better navigator ever trod a ship's planking. I might even have made him the skipper of our sister-ship, the Red Death, in the course of time. I have long been dissatisfied with Gonsalvo, who has yet to make a better showing at our next rendezvous, or—But, there's too much of this. It wasn't to be. The fact of the young rascal having bewitched you was alone sufficient to seal his fate."

"Caramba, what an imagination you have, Papa Redbeard!"

"It isn't my imagination," moodily, "as you well know."

"Well, what of it? Is it any more than natural that I should tire of cruising forever with you in this bloody trade?"

"Carletta, you are my only sister's only child. If I had but Aileen, my only brother's sole daughter, as well—of whom that mysterious witch, the Maid of Montauk, has robbed me—to keep you company, my sum of happiness would be complete. Besides, what have I not done for you? Have I not provided you with the best instruction in music and other accomplishments? And do you forget that you might have remained to queen it at *San Christophe*, but for your accompanying me on this last cruise of your own choice?"

Carletta shrugged her pretty shoulders.

"To queen it over a half-savage horde of buccaneers' descendants, and their black, yellow or copper-colored slaves!" she exclaimed, disdainfully. "A noble privilege, truly! Little wonder that I should long for the untrammelled loneliness of the blue water, as a grateful change!"

Before he could answer, there were hurried steps on the companionway, and then Dirkman, the mate, thrust his head into the saloon.

"A prize sighted, captain!" he cried, eagerly.

"Looks like a Spaniard, and a rich one, too!"

The pirate chieftain hastily drained off his goblet, and then sprang up.

"I am with you!" he exclaimed, and at once quitted the saloon.

CHAPTER III.

LIP TO LIP.

THEN the disguised young sailor was on his knees at Carletta's feet.

The young girl threw her arms about his neck, her face softening beautifully with the glow of love that filled it to overflowing.

"I had already got word of thy escape from death, my beloved!" she murmured. "Tola, my maid, brought me the hint from Pambo. God be praised, you live, you are with me yet again!"

"Yes, thank Heaven!" responded Jack, though partly withdrawing from the extravagance of her caresses. "But, be careful, my darling. Much as I long to clasp you in my

arms, this lamp and pot black that disguises my complexion must not leave any betraying traces on your face or arms."

"Ah! well, I shall try to moderate my transports for the present. But tell me the particulars of your escape."

"Not now; though there is much more that I must say. First, however, we must be secure against interruption."

"True!" And then she called, softly, "Tola!" whereupon the negress appeared. "Tola, keep watch at the foot of the companionway."

"Is the girl faithful to you?" demanded Jack in some doubt.

"True as steel—as true as Pambo must be to you."

"Good, then!" and the disguised youth rose to his feet, while still keeping his arm lovingly around the girl. "Carletta, you have not repented your determination to escape with me?"

"Repented? What a question!"

"Still, I have feared your attachment for your uncle might prove too strong."

"Never believe it! Besides, much as Redbeard has done for me, I do not believe that he is really my kinsman."

"Heaven grant it may prove so!"

"I echo your hope, my Juan! But, more of this hereafter. Now tell me your plan. Is it the one of the long-boat, and with Pambo as the companion of our flight?"

"Yes; and if you see no objection, we might take Tola and Matanko, the Indian boy, along with us."

"So much the better, I should say; that is, if it can be managed."

"Oh, we will manage to get off when the time comes. Pambo is already perfecting our plans."

"Buena! When do we start?"

"Not to-night, at all events. The moon is too bright, and then, here is this fresh prize to keep all the pirates on the alert."

"That is true."

"It will be the oft-repeated tale of blood, I suppose. A wholesale slaughter, the tossing of the wretched survivors to the sharks, the sack of the ship, the obliterating torch."

"Ave, Maria! I suppose so."

"Carletta, it is simply horrible! I shall not rest till I have rescued you from these human monsters of the deep."

"Juan, my darling! can you long for that more than I do?"

"I believe it, I believe it! it must be so!" and regardless of his caution to her, he folded her in his arms. "And yet—"

"What would you doubt?" she asked, anxiously.

"Nothing! nothing! And yet you have lived as long as you can remember among these lawless men, or in their island community: while there remains that soft-eyed young pirate, Lorenzo, who had been so much with you before I came."

"Lorenzo! Why, he has been as an elder brother to me from my earliest recollections in *San Christophe*! Besides, he is faithful to the memory of a young lady of Porto Bello, who was once wrecked on the island, and afterward ransomed by her uncle, the rich bishop of that port."

"Ah, I am glad to know that!"

"You to be jealous! What about the mysterious Aileen?"

"She is as my sister, Letta; no more, I assure thee."

"Oh, I shall believe thee, Juan; it would simply be death to me otherwise, so dearly have I come to love thee. But, where is this girl?"

"That I dare not say until we are safely out of this accursed ship. Let it suffice that she is beyond Redbeard's utmost reach."

"But, why should he so earnestly desire to have her for my companion, as he says? And is she, think you, really his niece, as he claims?"

"I can only hope not, Letta—answering your last question first. There is horror in the mere thought of that monster's kinship coursing in the pure veins of Aileen; though I confess there is a mystery as to her birth which is unfathomed as yet."

"And this strange woman-enemy of Redbeard, whom he so often and furiously alludes to as the Maid of Montauk, or as the Smuggler Queen? Who, and what is she, Juan?"

"A yet stranger mystery," replied the young man, somewhat gloomily. "That is, she is all that Redbeard designates her. Furthermore, she is Marion Merrivale, or, Marion of the Mists. And well may the pirate hate and fear her!"

"But what do you know of her?"

"Listen, my beloved. In any of your voyages northward in the *Black Death*, have you never sighted that bold eastern headland of Long Island, on our colonial coast, known as Montauk?"

"Yes; once when a mere child. Redbeard also had the Red Death with him at that time, and was on the lookout for a British transport rich in coin for the payment of the garrisons in New York and elsewhere, though she escaped him. A long, high and rolling, treeless promon-

tory, with the sea bursting more or less furiously forever at the base of its precipitous foreland or head."

"That is the place—Montauk Head or Point. And how long ago was this, dearest?"

"Five years ago, or more. I could not have been more than eleven or twelve at the time. It was my first and last voyage so far North out of the tropic seas."

"What caused the headland to remain so fixed in your memory?"

"We lay off there for several days. Redbeard seemed divided in his mind as to whether he should attack one of the Hampton villages along the shore, or assault a lone, large and rambling tower or house on the very crest of the wild headland itself, with a deep, rock-girt little bay at its stormy foot. Finally, at sunset of a tempestuous day, a swarm of small, daring little sailing craft, apparently crowded with armed men, suddenly hovered out of the bay like so many gigantic sea-birds and approached us menacingly. Thereupon Redbeard growled out that there was neither honor nor profit in fighting such small fry, and gave orders to sail away. On the following day several rich prizes in rapid succession compensated him for his disappointment, if such it had been."

"Ha! small fry, indeed!" cried the young sailor. "That lone house on the wild headland was and is the home, the castle-keep, of Marion of the Mists. There, in solitary state, has she lived, a strange and beautiful mystery, ever since I can remember. The house is itself a mystery. Built of solid and imperishable rough stone, some think it is a tower-relic of the Norsemen, who may have visited those shores centuries before the New World dreams of Columbus and his contemporaries were realized. Be that as it may, the Maid of Montauk is the unquestioned queen there over savage hunters on land and savage fishers on sea alike."

"She is also reported to have grown rich and powerful by smuggling. Those swarms of bird-like craft, which so frightened the sea vulture from his contemplated swoop, were and are the craft of her leal adherents, numbering among them quite as many Montauk and Shinnecock red-men as whites, and all as ready to die as to ply their adventurous trade for her. The most eastern of the Hampton villages of which you speak, just back of the long wilderness of the Montauk promontory, was East Hampton, where I was born, and where my dear mother, Dame Bobstay, is doubtless still mourning over the two years' absence of her sailor son, and wondering if he will ever return to her from over the sea."

"How strange is all this!" exclaimed Carletta. "Tell me, Juan, is this mysterious Marion of the Mists old, or is she young?"

"None knows her age, to my knowledge, save herself. That, like everything else belonging to her history, seems to be locked, a secret, in her own breast. But I have often seen her. She might be in her first youth for all the impress that time has made upon her lineaments. Fair as a sea sprite, stately as a queen, there would be something unearthly in her beauty but for an immovable sternness that is never absent from it. And yet, she can be sweet and gentle, though she is never known to smile."

Here Tola glided into the saloon, and, with a warning, vanished into one of the after cabins.

When Redbeard entered, a moment later, Carletta was laughingly reclining in the seat in which he had left her, while the pretended Koko was obsequiously engaged in making before her various pantomimic gestures which she seemed trying to imitate.

CHAPTER IV.

THE STORY OF A REVENGE.

"KOKO is teaching me the sign language," said Carletta, looking up with a laugh. "I find it amusing."

Redbeard nodded good-humoredly—he was always good-humored, after his fashion, with a fresh prize in prospect—and, selecting a large telescope from a number that occupied a rack above the buffet, he muttered a few words, and then hurried on deck again.

"Tola!" called the young girl.

The black maid once more appeared, to resume her station at the foot of the companionway.

"Now we are once more secure, my darling!" cried Carletta, impatiently. "Tell me more of this strange Maid of Montauk and her singular life."

"But, there is little more that I know of her, my beloved," was the reply.

"Then tell me your own story of your being so strangely found on that life-raft."

He looked at her hesitatingly.

"I was intending," he said, "to defer that narrative until we should have escaped from this accursed ship together."

"Tell me now, dearest Juan," appealingly. "There may not occur such an opportunity as this in a long time."

"So be it, then."

"First, then, was it not with the very purpose of being picked up by Redbeard that you were the solitary occupant of that raft?"

"Ha! you have divined that?"

"Yes, long ago; or Redbeard divined it for me."

"Strange that he bore with me so long, then!"

"He rather liked you, could he have trusted in your fidelity?"

"He was wiser in fearing me. Fidelity? Yes; to vengeance and to justice!"

"You had then procured yourself to be cast adrift from on board that fast sailer that slipped so mysteriously out of the Black Death's far-reaching clutch?"

"Yes."

"And was that fast schooner, the Sally Ann, of Sag Harbor, as Redbeard suspected?"

"It was."

"Juan, how long have you thus been shadowing Redbeard, the pirate, over the wide seas?"

"For two long years."

"And to what end?"

"For more purposes than one. For satisfaction, for proofs, and, if need be, for vengeance."

"This is of course inexplicable to me. Whom or what would you avenge?"

"The doom, whatever it may have been, of Gascoyne, the Adventurer."

"Who and what was he?"

"My benefactor, and, more than likely, Aileen's father."

"Am I not to have the story?"

"If there be time," he glanced a little suspiciously toward the saloon entrance, "and I can word it briefly enough—yes, then, Carletta, I will tell it thee."

"When I was but a fisher-boy between East Hampton and Montauk, something of a pet among the Maid's wild smuggler crew, there were but three survivors of a mysterious shipwreck off the Point. They were two men, one of whom bore with him in safety to the shore a lovely child of three or four years old. The child was subsequently committed by Marion of the Mists to my mother's care, and became my foster-sister, Aileen. The man who had saved her with himself was Gascoyne, the Adventurer. His fellow-survivor was a swarthy and silent man, calling himself Perez. To the best of my knowledge, both were strangers, and their lips remained sealed as to the name, character and destination of the ship whose wreck they escaped."

"Both at once became influential members among Marion's men. Report also had it that the Maid loved Gascoyne, but of that there can be no certainty. Despite his taciturnity, he was a fair-skinned, bright-haired, laughing-eyed wave-wanderer of thirty or thirty-five, fearless, intelligent, capable—the *beau ideal* of an ocean rover, with a mystery behind him. And there was no denying that he was speedily deeper in the Maid's confidence than she had ever before or has ever since permitted any man to be. The stranger Perez was no less a mystery than he, though of a more sinister and deadly temper, notwithstanding that they were apparently inseparable as friends."

"Three years after their incorporation with the smugglers, three boats from a large ship that had suddenly appeared in the offing, landed a large force of foreign and miscellaneous cut-throats, who made an unexpected attack upon the cave-fastness underneath Marion's tower."

"After a brief but desperate fight, the assailants were beaten off, and pursued to their boats. As the latter retreated to their ship, Perez was perceived on one of them, regarding with a mocking scowl his late companions. Had he endeavored to betray them? There was no telling, though it was subsequently proved that he was a younger brother of Redbeard's, from whose pirate ship the attack had been made."

"Then Gascoyne, the Adventurer, was found to be missing, and his sea-chest rifled in a nook of the cave-fastness that he had occupied, together with Perez. The next day, Marion of the Mists sent for me, and imparted to me a confidence. She exhibited to me a parchment covered with cabalistic signs."

"See, my friend," she said. "This and a companion slip were in Gascoyne's possession. One was a false, the other a true, guide to the main treasure buried by Captain Kidd, the great freebooter, on Gardiner's Island, many years ago. This is the false or decoy guide; the other and true one must now be in Perez's possession, and the noble Gascoyne has doubtless been abducted or killed in order to wrest it from him. Henceforth, if you consent, you are to be under my protection, with the sole end in view that Gascoyne is to be rescued or avenged, as the case may be, and the missing parchment recovered."

"She went into further particulars, as to Redbeard's object in seizing the document, as to the improbability of his ever being able to decipher its secret writing, of which but two persons in the world, she and Gascoyne, were conversant with the key, and other matters."

"Why," I asked, "have not you and Gascoyne secured the treasure before this, if it was in your power to do so as you declare?"

"We deemed it safer if it remained buried,"

was her reply. "Besides, the great object was not ripe for the advancement of which we would have used the money."

"I was vain and bold enough to inquire into this object. 'America is on the threshold of a war with the mother country for her independence,' she made answer. 'Jack, my little friend, I am a patriot, and so is—or was, as the case may be—Gascoyne, the Adventurer. Draw your conclusions from this response.'"

"I at once gave my consent, and have been her protégé ever since. I was then fifteen. For five years I was among her smugglers, frequently taking long and perilous voyages, and slowly but surely winning my way to proficiency in the art of navigation. At the end of that time, Marion of the Mists deemed me ripe for her purpose. She purchased the Sally Ann, of Sag Harbor, the largest and fleetest schooner on the American coast, manned her with picked men from her tried and numerous adherents, and placed me in command. I kissed her white hand, bade good-by to my mother and Aileen, and sailed away, ostensibly as a miscellaneous trader, in reality for the objects I have set forth. Our cruise had lasted two years, interspersed with many profitable adventures, but without result as to our main object, until finally we were pursued by this pirate ship with the result of which you are aware. That is the story."

Carletta was about to ask more questions when the bow-chaser was heard to boom forth, and this was followed by the tramp of many feet here and there upon the deck.

The next instant Tola came hurrying back into the cabin, giving her young mistress a warning sign.

The disguised young sailor seized Carletta's hand, pressed it to his heart, with a significant look, and hastened away.

Regaining the deck, he proceeded forward to the caboose, with an obsequiousness in keeping with his assumed character.

As he did so, he furtively took in the situation with a swift sailor's glance.

The pirate crew were already at quarters, armed to the teeth. Redbeard and his officers were grouped together aft, silently, or in muttered conversation, intent upon the fugitive; a large, heavily-laden brig, evidently a Spaniard or Portuguese, four miles away, and careering over the moonlit sea before the stiff gale like a monstrous affrighted bird.

The shot from the pirate's bow-chaser was repeated, but only to fall ridiculously short; and it was fairly obvious, notwithstanding the Black Death's superior sailing qualities, that, barring accident, the chase might be a long one.

Jack, having arrived at this conclusion, entered the caboose, where he found Pambo, his black friend, alone.

"It is good, Marse Jack," said the cook, after listening to the success of the young sailor's disguise. "Oh, if de moonlight would only be squenched out! Den we could gib Redbeard de go-by. I se got eberyting ready."

"Let us watch and wait," advised Jack Bobstay. "It is all that we can do at present."

CHAPTER V.

A TRAGEDY OF THE DEEP.

SOON after daybreak on the following day the pirate ship and her ocean prize were rocking side by side on the gently heaving bosom of the calming deep.

The first stages in the tragedy were completed. The brig, a valuable one from Porto Bello, bound for Cadiz, with numerous wealthy Central American passengers on board, was a helpless captive at last. A brief resistance had been stamped out in blood; the plundering and dismantling of the prize was now under way, as a preliminary to giving her to the flames; sharks already swarmed around both vessels, drawn thither by the dead and dying who had been tossed into their jaws; and under close guard on the high poop-deck of the brig was a hapless group of captives—among them a richly-dressed young lady of pure Castilian beauty, her mulatto maid, and a tall, portly man of middle-age, in priestly garb—awaiting their terrible and too evident doom.

Such of the pirate crew as were not directly engaged in systematically despoiling the brig were busy cleaning up decks on their own ship.

After an active and sleepless night, Redbeard emerged from his cabin breakfast.

"Pambo," he called out to the negro cook, who was passing, "send over what food you can spare to yonder prisoners." And then, with a speculative scowl in the direction of the devoted group, he added to his second mate: "The priest and the señorita look as if a ransom might be forthcoming. But, at all events, there can be no harm in permitting them to step overboard with full stomachs."

The pretended Koko was the assistant selected for the service by the cook.

Most of the miserables rejected the food that was offered them, though one or two of them, including the fat priest, who did not seem to yet realize the possible horrors of his situation,

ate voraciously, and even grumbled that the wine furnished was not of a better quality.

His beautiful young companion so far forgot her own wretchedness as to regard him wonderingly with her haggard eyes.

"Uncle, how can you eat?" she asked him in Spanish. "These cut-throats undoubtedly mean to throw us to the sharks at their leisure. Better continue to beseech Heaven for aid."

"Nonsense, my dear niece!" the churchman managed to reply, with his mouth full and his jaws hard at work. "One must eat and drink when famishing."

She turned from him, seemingly half in pity, half in disgust.

Then, with a consoling sign for her maid, who was nigh to fainting with fright, her sad eyes rested upon the disguised young sailor's face, after which she regarded him with searching eagerness.

"You, *amigo*, are not what you seem," she said to him in a low voice, watching her opportunity; "and there is also sympathy and commiseration in your face. Your secret is safe with me. Confess it, I beseech!"

"Señorita, you speak truly," was the guarded response, in the same tongue. "I am a disguised man among the pirates, my enemies. What would you with me?"

She drew from her bosom a small flat packet incased in metal, which she pressed into his hand under cover of some dishes that he was carrying.

"Take this!" she whispered. "It contains certain letters, besides a mysterious writing, which may be of importance to some one. It was given to my uncle, the bishop here, by one Perez, a desperate villain, under the seal of confession at the point of death, as he supposed. The letters will acquaint the world with our names, station and miserable fate, should you ever succeed in reaching the world of honest humanity again. Be careful; we are observed."

Jack had just time to conceal the package on his person when Redbeard, accompanied by several of his choice minions, passed over the gang-plank connecting the two decks, and, after a hasty glance over the plundering work, which was now nearly completed, strode among the group.

"You first, padre!" he exclaimed, uncere- moniously knocking a flask of wine out of the priest's hands, and then slapping him on his capacious paunch. "The Bishop of Porto Bello, eh? Well, what wealth might you have left in that port that would stead you as a ransom from my hands?"

The padre wiped his fat lips and began to whimper, pray, exhort and explain in the same breath.

But, he was interrupted the instant it was made apparent that his sole worldly wealth, which he had hoped to transfer from Porto Bello to Cadiz, was already in the corsairs' hands, in the shape of not a few goodly treasure-chests.

"Away with him!" shouted the chief. "We've one prayer-mouther at San Christophe already, with no room for more."

With barely time for a last despairing scream, the wretched padre was laid hold of and tossed over the rail into the shark-infested sea.

Speechless with horror, the señorita had grasped the pirate captain's arm appealingly.

Then both she and her maid were grasped at arm's-length in his ruthless hands, and he was gazing speculatively into their horror-written faces—for, strange as it may seem, avarice and blood were his sole vices, without sensual admixture.

"Brave husbands for both of you on the rock-girt little isle!" he growled, approvingly. "Here, L'Élonais," to his second mate, a French desperado, "look to the security of the pretty ones. Then overboard with the rest!"

But, at this instant, the señorita broke away from his clutch.

"Lorenzo!" she shrieked, her gaze directed toward a young pirate among a working group on the opposite deck.

He looked up in a sort of dream, not having had more than a passing glimpse of the captives.

"Carmen!" was shouted, in reply. "What, do I dream?" and bounding over the gang-plank to her side, the next instant they were locked in each other's arms.

"Oho!" roared Redbeard, who had no patience with reunions of this sort, at such a time. "Tear them asunder!"

"Never!" cried the youth. "Once reunited, we part no more. Is it not so, my beloved?"

She only looked up into his glorified face, murmuring her devotion and love, sea-outlaw though she had found him, her first, her only love.

"Overboard with them, then!" commanded the chief, now in a transport of fury, at such infractions of discipline. "No space for lovers in the fore-castle of the Black Death!"

The order was obeyed as soon as spoken; but, just as the devoted pair, still close in their loving embrace, were disappearing over the rail, Carletta appeared at the head of the companion-way on the adjoining ship.

"Stop!" she screamed, taking in the significance of the tragedy at one horrified, blanching glance. "Papa Redbeard, on your peril!"—But it was too late!

Then, with a face of snow, but her eyes blazing with indignation, she darted along the bridging plank.

A movement of the waves caused it to tilt, and then, with a bewildered cry, she was overboard between the two vessels!

Scarcely had she disappeared before Jack Bobstay, dropping the heap of dishes that were in his hands, was over the rail to the rescue!

Fortunately, the sharks were all busy with their bloody feast on the other side of the brig.

The young sailor had the girl in his arms almost instantly, and, seizing a rope that had been thrown over to him, he speedily regained the deck with his burden.

Carletta had not fainted, and now her first act was to cling to her rescuer with a low despairing wail.

Jack realized his new peril as he perceived Redbeard regarding him with a mixture of mystification and fury, while others of the pirates were looking on in superstitious dread.

The sea-bath had washed away his disguising swarthy skin, and the counterfeit Koko was once more the fair-skinned, blue-eyed mystery of the mid-ocean life-raft!

"The dead alive!" murmured a score of voices. "Back out of the sharks' jaws!"

"That be blowed!" snarled the now infuriated chief. "Overboard with the young traitor!"

CHAPTER VI.

A FAVORING NIGHT'S WORK.

STILL more or less under the influence of superstitious dread, the immediately-surrounding pirates might have hesitated in obeying this terrible order, but that, at this instant, Dirkman, the mate, came suddenly on deck, after about completing the superintendence of the plundering work, and took in the situation at a glance.

This man had hated Jack from the very first. With a sort of snarl, he bounded forward, inspiring others by his example, and headed a rush upon the helpless and momentarily bewildered youth.

But, at this instant, Carletta, still dripping, and with her long glossy black hair snapping its wet tresses in the rising wind, produced a delicate poniard, and, springing upon the bulwark-guard, determinedly poised it against her own breast.

"Your choice, Papa Redbeard!" she cried. "Immunity for that young man, instant, absolute and on your plighted word, or, with this dagger in my heart, the sharks shall not be twice disappointed in their feast on me, at least! Which shall it be?"

Redbeard made an irresolute gesture, and then ordered Dirkman and the others to stand back.

"Answer me this, first, Carletta," he cried. "Who was responsible for this young man's escape in the first instance?"

"I was," she replied, with a mendacity that was assuredly commendable just then. "Before a shark could snap its jaws, I had him by the hair and up in through one of the after ports."

"What!" incredulously; "and yet you rushed on deck, white to swooning, almost at the critical instant?"

"True; a bit of my acting. I then secreted the young man. Koko went overboard later on, perceived by me alone. It was at my suggestion that Jack Bobstay assumed the character of the lost mute, and so successfully as even to deceive old Pambo, the cook, himself."

"You are cleverer than I had deemed," growled the chief. "The youth's life is yours, since you have saved it a second time; but, let him keep out of my sight as much as may be." And, with that, he strode away, silencing the mutterings of Dirkman and one or two others with a warning gesture, which they knew too well to disregard.

With a last grateful glance at Carletta as she calmly stepped down from the bulwark, Jack Bobstay bounded across the gang-plank, and disappeared among the groups on the Black Death's decks.

Pambo, who had witnessed the whole affair from the door of the caboose, drew a long breath of relief at last.

The sky had been steadily growing overcast from soon after sunrise, as if the face of the day were veiling itself in horror at the tragedies enacted beneath its gaze.

Notwithstanding that it still kept growing darker and darker, the usual drunkenness after a prize raking, now began to possess the greater part of the pirate crew, while the rest were completing the plundering of the brig, as a final preliminary to giving her to the flames.

Jack had at last taken the precaution to conceal himself in one of the smaller unused cabins aft of the saloon.

Here, a little later on, he was joined by Carletta, who surprised him while in the act of examining the contents of the metal-cased packet he had received at the hands of the unfortunate señorita.

He sprang to his feet, and the young girl rushed into his outstretched arms.

"My love, my life!" he exclaimed; "what do I not owe you?"

"Hush!" she murmured. "Pray Heaven, though, that I am pardoned for those falsehoods!"

"They gave me my life!" embracing her. "Is not that enough?"

"My Juan! But, what is this that you were examining?"

He exhibited the case, and explained the extraordinary manner of its coming into his hands.

"But the contents are yet more remarkable," he continued. "Look!"

He selected from among a number of letters, written in Spanish and in a delicate feminine hand, a time yellowed parchment, which, on being unfolded, proved to be covered with words, detached letters and figures, arranged in seemingly meaningless rows.

"What is that?" demanded the wondering girl.

"The true key to the buried treasure of Captain Kidd, whose strange disappearance I told you of."

"Is it possible?"

"I am sure it can be nothing else."

"But, how do you account for this?"

"The man who gave it to the señorita's uncle under the seal of confession may have been Perez himself, who would, in that case, have succeeded in keeping Redbeard in ignorance of his possessing it."

"True; and what, then, can have become of Gascoyne, the Adventurer?"

"Alas! that is a mystery yet to be solved. But, joy with me, my darling, in the possession of this precious document!"

"You then hold it so precious?"

"Heavens, I should say so! Why, let us but succeed in reaching the Maid of Montauk with this prize, and what a career is in store for me!"

"What career, then, my Juan?"

"Marion of the Mists will decipher these mystic characters; the buried treasure will be at our command; and then the dream of her life and of mine will be realized."

"And that dream?"

"Carletta, it will enable us to fit me out in the staunchest and fleetest privateer that ever skimmed the seas. Oh, she shall be a spanker, my love—a terror to the British marine! and the dream of American independence shall be substantiated not the least by the efforts of this sailor's hand of mine."

"But that would take you away from me?"

"Wherefore? Are not you yourself, my own true daughter of the sea enough to companion me as a privateersman's bride?"

Carletta's black eyes sparkled.

"That is more to the purpose, my Juan!" she exclaimed, with something of his enthusiasm. "Let me see that mysterious parchment again."

"Not just now, darling; it is grown too dark for you to study its characters. What a morning this is!" and he glanced curiously out of the open port near which they were sitting. "Darker and darker, like the setting in of another night before its time! and the wind seems to be rising, too."

Here there came a tap at the port, and the next instant Pambo's woolly head and grinning face filled the opening.

"All aboard, Marse Jack!" he hoarsely whispered. "Here am de long boat ready to cut away. No time like de present. Eberbody busy or drunk on deck. Hurry up befo' dey fire up de brig, an' make eberyting light."

It was some moments before Jack and Carletta could thoroughly realize that the longed-for hour of escape was at last really at hand.

But it was none the less true. The faithful and intelligent negro had done his work admirably.

There, rocking on the dark waves under the deep shadow of the stern-overhang, was the staunch long-boat in perfect readiness.

"Wait!" said Carletta. "A few moments will place me in readiness, and then I shall bring Tola and Matanko back with me."

She disappeared, while Jack Bobstay, climbing out of the port, lowered himself into the boat at Pambo's side, where they both waited in such anxiety and suspense as can readily be imagined.

In the mean time the carousings of the pirates continued on the main-deck, from which the flash of lanterns now and then shot fitfully out over the unnaturally darkened waters.

"It's de debbil's own mawnin'," whisperingly commented the negro, "an' I reckon dat a big storm am in de air. Better dat, dough, dan Marse Redbeard's company. Eh, Marse Jack?"

"True enough, Pambo," was the reply. "Better anything than another day or even another hour in this floating hell!"

CHAPTER VII.

GOOD-BY!

THEN the young sailor, after curiously observing the hull lines of the ship as well as the obscurity would admit, turned to his companion with suppressed excitement.

"By Jupiter, you seem to have neglected nothing, Pambo!" he exclaimed, in a low voice. "You must have even knocked out the big plugs in the ship's bottom, for she is already beginning to settle."

Pambo chuckled.

"Does you tink I'd furgit dat, Marse Jack?" he replied. "Golly! dem plugs am out dese twenty minutes."

The plugs referred to had long been provided by Redbeard, in order to insure the scuttling of his ship at the shortest notice in case of dire necessity, it being his standing and not idle boast that the Black Death should go to the bottom with all on board sooner than strike her flag of ill-omen to whatsoever superior force.

At this juncture Carletta returned to the port, accompanied by her maid and the Indian boy, both of whom seemed only too glad to take their chances with the fugitives, however desperate these might prove.

A couple of large, hastily-packed portmantaux were first handed out. Then the young girl descended into the boat, to be followed by her humble companions.

All being in readiness, the painter was cut, and the fugitives drifted slowly back in the pirate's wake, while the dread ship and her prize, still lashed together, passed on under the light sail they were carrying.

The deck of the former was now seen to be thronged with men, mostly in the best of good-humor, while from the shouts that were going up from a large crowd of them massed forward, it was evident that the booty in hard cash was being divided on the capstan-head after the rough-and-ready custom among those ocean outlaws.

The situation of the fugitives was still very critical, however, inasmuch as there was still enough light for them to be discovered by any sharp lookout that might chance to be cast astern.

But, fortune favored them, and at last, when they were several cable-lengths away, Pambo made a significant sign to Jack, who at once, with Matanko's assistance, silently set to work stepping the boat's mast, and getting her sail in readiness.

When this was accomplished, they began to tack rapidly away to the southwest, and all began to breathe more freely.

The obscurity had deepened, rather than lightened, but at this juncture, when they were about a mile distant, a great shout arose from the pirate's deck.

The cause was speedily apparent.

The brig had been cut adrift, and the incendiary torch applied to her gutted hull in a hundred or more places.

In a few minutes she was wreathed in flames, which flung out their lurid brightness for miles around.

Carletta clasped her hands, while Tola gave utterance to a despairing cry.

"We are discovered at last!" exclaimed the former. "See! Ah, Mother of Mercy, the wind is freshening, too!"

This was true. A yell of fury was heard from the corsair's deck, whence all eyes could be seen directed toward the fugitives; while Redbeard himself could be plainly distinguished raving up and down his quarter-deck against the lurid background, and doubtless shouting out his orders for the pursuit.

"Compose yourself, my Carletta," said Jack Bobstay, reassuringly. "True, our flight is discovered, but we shall be hardly retaken. Ha! what do you think of that?"

The sea-scurge had already been rounded to and additional sail clapped on with surprising celerity, but at that instant she was seen to be settling visibly, especially about the bows, while the utmost panic was observed to suddenly ensue on board in consequence.

"What does that mean?" cried the young girl, excitedly.

"It means that she is scuttled," replied Jack, impressively. "The accursed craft will never again fire a death-shot. She is doomed, together with every murder-stained soul on board!"

"You mean it?" she exclaimed, with whitening lips.

"Look for yourself! She is already three feet deeper, and with all hands at the pumps that can lay hold. But all in vain! Ha! there goes her bow-chaser!" as a puff of smoke sprang from the pirate's bow. "But see: the muzzle is already so much depressed that the shot buries itself in the waves."

"But they have boats with which they can pursue us still! They are getting them out now!" Pambo here burst into a sardonic laugh.

"De boats am no good, Missus Carletta," he explained, with a grin. "Forty, fifty holes in ebery plank ob dem boats! I tended to dat little business days an' days ago. Aha! what I tell you?"

One of the boats, crowded with men, had been got out, but only to fill almost instantly; and even at that distance, so brilliant was the illumination from the burning brig, the sharks could be tracked in their fatal darting to and fro among the swimmers who were striving to get back to the settling ship.

Carletta shut out the awful sight by burying her face in her hands, and bursting into a passion of stormy tears.

"Oh, they are all wicked—deserving their fate!" she sobbed. "I know that. But many of them were kind to me. I have been with their wives and children at San Christophe longer than I can remember. And Redbeard—villain that he is, and no real kin to me, as I am quite sure—was none the less my protector and benefactor from the very first."

The words came out disjointedly amid her tumultuous weeping.

Her lover appreciated her complex emotions, and strove to soothe her.

Finally, when she was partly composed, an exclamation from Pambo caused her to look up. The situation had greatly changed.

While the long boat was scudding away to the southeast, with the freshening wind on her quarter, the doomed ship was perceived to be almost gunwale-deep on the surface of the still illuminated sea.

But, in the mean time, another large ship had loomed from out the blackness of the north, and with the burning brig as her guide, was bearing swiftly down with the evident intention of rescuing the pirates.

"Ah!" sighed Carletta, whether with secret thankfulness or not it was hard to tell, and who had a sailor's eye of her own; "it is the twin pirate ship, the Red Death. I'd know her among a hundred, and perhaps Redbeard and his crew will be rescued."

"That is probably true," said Jack Bobstay, seriously. "At all events, she is heading for the sinking pirate with an air of comradeship. And, unless the weather thickens still more darkly—which is hardly likely at this time of day—we are lost."

"Lost!" she echoed, looking at him inquiringly.

"Of course, Carletta!" not without bitterness. "The Red Death I have always heard to be even a swifter sailer than the Black Death."

"That is true," she admitted, still not understanding, or but vaguely.

"Do you not see, then," he continued, half-averting his eyes, "that, unless we and our course are hidden, it will take but short space, as the weather clears, for the Red Death to rescue our late friends of the sinking sistership, and then, after listening to their story of our escape and responsibility for this disaster, to swoop down upon us for vengeance with comparative ease?"

Pambo, who was now at the helm, while the long boat was doing her best before the wind, nodded in grave corroboration of the apprehensions thus expressed.

Carletta gave a low little cry of dismay, which was echoed by Tola, while the Shinnecock boy crouched against Pambo's knees, anticipative terror already working in his dusky face.

"Oh!" she moaned, a little stupidly; "I hadn't thought of that."

"But, why should you care?" cried Jack, still with bitterness. "You are safe, even if we all fall again into their remorseless hands! They won't harm you, Carletta!"

She looked at him reproachfully, and then threw herself almost fiercely into his arms.

"Juan, how dare you distinguish me in this cruel way?" she half-sobbed, half-raved. "What! was it more than natural that I should feel a moment's compunction over the fate of those desperate but not unkindly men—not unkindly to me, among whom I have passed my young life as a sort of petted princess—that you should thus dare to question my fidelity to thee, for whom I have given up and risked everything, following you out over the wastes of waters I scarcely know where?"

It needed not this passionate vindication to melt the young sailor, and make him ashamed of his inconsiderateness.

"Forgive me, darling!" he faltered. "Ah, what a brute I was! I should have known better, I should have made allowances."

And then she was sobbing more contentedly on his breast, and there was peace once more between them on the lonely bosom of the deep.

"Dat am de bes' way," commented the giant negro, after a long pause. "Aha! de luck am still on ouah side."

It seemed so, at least. The broad-day darkness was shutting down more impenetrably. The last glimmer of the burning brig had died away, and both sinking pirate and her would-be rescuer were shut away in the obscurity.

But now the brooding darkness was mingled with an electrical storm of great violence, accompanied by a strong gale from the north.

However, the craft was an exceptionally large and stanch ship's boat, and, by shortening sail, together with careful steering, she was made to ride out a storm that might have quickly swamped a larger but less buoyant vessel.

With the help of an extra canvas, Jack and Pambo were, moreover, enabled to improvise a covered way or shelter amidships, which afforded Carletta and her maid both shelter from the driving spray and desirable degree of privacy at will.

The storm lasted nearly all day and then suddenly broke away, together with the strange obscurity that had prevailed almost uninterruptedly, leaving a bright sky, though with a stiff wind continuing.

"De luck am wid us," commented Pambo, at last, who at this point, after surrendering the tiller to Jack, was now enacting the part of steward in the apportionment of some of the provisions and water. "Not a sail in sight, at least so far as dese ole eyes ob mine kin make out."

"I think you are right," observed Jack, searchingly examining the horizon. "Still, I wish we might have brought a telescope along with us."

"And how do you know we did not, Juan, mio?" called out Carletta, issuing at last, and with smiling hopefulness, from under the canvas hood, to sit by his side. "Tola, open the larger of those portmanteaus there, and see what you may find."

This was done, to the unexpected revelation of Redbeard's best telescopes, together with several other expensive navigation instruments and several weapons, including cutlasses, a hatchet and three pistols, with the necessary ammunition.

"Ah!" cried the young girl, laughing a little triumphantly at the sensation evoked by this display; "I was thinking of something else than my wardrobe, as you must allow; though those other portmanteaus, I am bound to confess, are stuffed with nothing but my personal belongings and finery."

"Carletta, you are yourself the dearest treasure of all!" Jack exclaimed, gayly. "Here, Matanko, take the helm for a bit."

He then made use of the telescope, with the consequent satisfaction of declaring positively that not a sail was within its scope.

"But still, if only a friendly sail!" suggested Carletta.

"Oh, we must take our chances as to that," lightly answered the young adventurer, now joining the others in their frugal repast. "That we have successfully given the pirates the slip should be joy enough for the time being."

"Dat am de trufe," interposed Pambo, with his accustomed grin. "Golly! it seem almos' too good to beliebe."

"Juan," inquired Carletta, "about in what part of the world are we now?"

The young sailor considered the question reflectively, and then replied:

"About latitude 30 deg., I should judge, say midway between the Bermudas and the Florida Coast, and three hundred miles north by north-east of the Bahamas."

"And our first destination, Juan?"

He looked at her and laughed.

"A roving one at best, *querida mio*," he replied, "and yet not so very uncertain, either. I hope to be picked up by the Sally Ann."

"Very uncertain destination that, I should say!"

"But let us consider. When I caused myself to be turned adrift on the life-raft from her a month or more ago, she was in about latitude 20 deg., not far north of Porto Rico and the Windward Islands, taking her time in eluding the Black Death's chase of her. The pirates picked me up on the day following. Now the Sally Ann's instructions were to keep on the course of the Black Death as near as might be thereafter, without hazarding her own safety. And Tom Halyard is not the man to leave me in the lurch, if he can help it. There you are, my dear Carletta."

"And who is Tom Halyard?"

"My second in command on the Sally Ann, and as true a sea-dog as ever served the Maid of Montauk."

"I only hope," observed Carletta, after a long pause, "that the Sally Ann may have been able to follow the Black Death's course closely."

"There has been little to prevent her doing so—no exceptionally bad weather, nor violent storm, that might have hindered it."

"And, should we reach the Sally Ann, what then, Juan?"

"Then?" his eyes flashed. "Northward ho! I suppose, and privateering for American Independence, let us trust. Still, much will depend on the events that may have taken place during my two years' wanderings; and, moreover, Marion of the Mists will decide that for us."

"Shall you be glad to meet the strange woman again, Juan?"

"That will I, my darling! and glad, too, shall she be—if a little surprised, into the bargain—of the beautiful bride I shall bring home with me."

"Don't be too sure of that, Juan," with a flushing cheek. "However, is there not one disappointment with which you dread to confront her?"

"What is that, my dear?"

She looked at him steadily.

"Continued ignorance with regard to the fate of Gascoyne, the Adventurer?"

CHAPTER VIII.

A CANNONADE'S WARNING.

A TROUBLED look came into Jack Bobstay's frank face at this remark,

"True," he said, at last, "the weird woman may not take it in good part that I shall bring home with me no word of the missing Gascoyne. However," brightening up with his accustomed buoyancy, "she shall yet not find me empty-handed," and he significantly tapped his breast, where the casket containing the mysterious parchment was concealed.

The young girl saw that the subject was an embarrassing one, and therefore made no further allusion to it.

"Juan," she said, at last, "you have never told me how you and Pambo had become acquainted before meeting on Redbeard's ship."

Jack smiled, while Pambo, who had overheard the question, looked up with an especially pleased grin.

"It is easily told, my dear Carletta," the former replied. "Pambo was one of the Maid of Montauk's wild crew, years ago, when I was the merest stripling. You can judge of the satisfaction, no less than of the surprise, with which I recognized him as ship's-cook on the Black Death."

"Huh!" exclaimed Pambo, supplying the missing thread of his individual story. "My getting among dem pirates was jes' dis way, as mebbe I done tole you befo', Marse Jack."

"Dat day, long, long time ago, when Redbeard's men made dat 'tack on ouah stronghol' at Montauk dat wound up wid de disappearance of Gascoyne an' Perez, I war on de way back to de Point, wid two oder smugglers, in a little sloop crammed wid French brandy, dat we'd lightered off a Marseilles barque, what war loafin' jes' outside Sandy Hook for more'n free weeks tryin' to get de bes' ob de British rebuene cutters dere. Understan', Missy Carletta?"

"Yes, I understand, Pambo," replied the young girl, nodding.

"An' you, Marse Jack, mebbe you done reckomember dat little sloop what nebber come back to de Point?"

"Very well, Pambo," Jack made answer.

"Marion and all her men made up their minds that she was lost at sea."

"So she war, arter a fashion, Marse Jack—lost inter Redbeard's big grab, dat's what she war. My two comrades war made to walk de plank bekaze dey 'fused to j'ine de pirate crew. Dat lef' me an' de brandy in deir han's. De Black Death's cook had gone crazy wid rum an' jumped oberboard two days befo'. I 'sented to fill him berth. Dat am de whole story."

Jack, to whom these details had been made known before, turned thoughtfully to Carletta.

"How strange that Pambo and I should meet on the pirate after all those years!" he observed. "It seems like something more than mere accident or chance—rather like Fate itself."

"It does, indeed, my dear Juan," she replied. "I can but believe in Fate, especially with regard to your strange adventures, and the way in which you and I have been brought together and preserved for each other thus far against so many menacing perils. Let us take it as a good omen for the future."

"Ah, we shall do that!"

"But tell me, Pambo," and Carletta again turned her soft eyes upon the negro. "You should know something of the fate of that strange being, Gascoyne, the adventurer?"

Both Pambo and the young sailor shook their heads.

"No," replied the latter, speaking for both. "As a matter of course, I have already questioned Pambo many times on that subject, but without result. He knows nothing."

"Only dis much, Marse Jack, dat I done tole you befo'," interposed the negro. "When de Black Death sailed away to de souf dat chap Perez make hisself mighty at home in de s'loon, an' if war easy to see he war kin of some sort to Cap'n Redbeard. An' den dere war talk 'bout dere bein' anoder ob Marion's men a close prisoner somewhars back in one ob de after cabins. Dat man, I take it, must have been Marse Gascoyne, dough ob course I didn't den know 'bout him bein' missin', too, from de band arter dey had whipped off de pirates from de rock. But de mystery ob dat prisoner war nebber solved outside ob Cap'n Redbeard hisself an' Marse Perez. When we done got to San Christophe, a big long box war took ashore by a picked boat's crew, an' dat war de las' ob it, fur d'rectly arter dat all de cabins war aired an' cleaned, an' dere warn't no more sign ob a secret captive. But whedder dat big long box war a dead man's coffin or a live man's bird-cage no one ebber knowed. Dat's de 'stent ob my knowledge on dis subjec', Marse Jack."

"And the man, Perez, what of him, Pambo?"

"He ran away from San Christophe in a whaleboat, wid free oder pirates, in less'n a week. I tink he must hab karried away wid him somet'ing dat Cap'n Redbeard wanted mighty bad. Anyway, de cap'n he war jes' hoppin' mad. An' to de bes' ob my 'telligence nuffin' ain't been see'd ob Marse Perez sence."

Jack and Carletta exchanged a significant glance.

How strange that Perez should have drifted to Porto Bello, there to confide to the bishop the mysterious parchment, which had afterward come, by even a stranger combination of circumstances, into the young sailor's possession!

More strongly, hour by hour, was becoming the impression that their young lives were chosen instruments in the hands of Fate for the evolution, perhaps, of some great and subtle purpose.

Night came down upon the handful of fortune-seekers in the open boat, but, the wind and weather continuing favorable, it was passed with but little discomfort.

The entire next day and yet another night they continued on their course, heading for the Bermudas, without sighting a sail.

On the morning of the next day following, however, they became aware of a sound resembling a distant cannonade.

"What can that be?" cried Carletta.
"A sea fight of some sort," replied her lover, "or I am greatly mistaken."

And he forthwith slightly altered the course, heading away in the direction of the sounds.

CHAPTER IX. LUCKY OMENS.

"Ah, Juan!" cried Carletta, anxiously; "why do you alter our course?"

"And why not, my dear?" returned Jack, smiling. "Isn't a sea-fight, if this should prove one, worth looking at?"

"But if it should prove the remaining pirate ship as one of the contestants?"

"Then we can but hope to see her get the worst of it. But be of good heart, my darling. There is no danger for us."

He further explained that the advantage of their being in such a small craft, together with the fine telescope in their possession, would doubtless enable them to get a pretty near view of such a fight, with but small risk of being perceived from the deck of either adversary.

The surmise as to an engagement being in progress was speedily proved to be correct.

The booming of the guns grew louder and louder, and presently the smoke could be seen against the clear tints of the eastern sky, where the sun was just raising his head over the sea-line.

Then, with the scant preliminary gloaming characteristic of the tropics, it was suddenly broad day; and the outlines of the vessels engaged were likewise described, seemingly about a mile apart.

"An armed brig and a full-rigged ship, to the best of my judgment," commented Jack, with the telescope already leveled. "It's more than likely a Britisher or a Spaniard engaged with a Frenchman."

"What makes you think that, Juan?" asked Carletta.

"I can't think of any other great naval powers that are at war," he replied, slowly. "Though, of course, the Yankees ought to have any number of privateers, and perhaps a regular cruiser or two, afloat by this time. Here, Pambo, you take a squint."

Pambo took the glass, but without being able to arrive at anything more definite by his bringing it to bear.

"I suppose I, for one, must have grown near-sighted!" exclaimed Carletta, impatiently, at last.

They all looked at her with surprise, as she turned her beautifully brilliant eyes, half laughingly, upon them.

"Near-sighted, you, Carletta?" cried her lover. "What makes you suppose that?"

"Because no one asks me to take a squint," demurely.

There was a general laugh, and the glass was forthwith placed at her disposal.

"Well, what do you make out the lesser vessel to be?" demanded Jack, after a pause, while she was making the examination. "Spaniard or Frenchman, which?"

"Neither the one nor the other," calmly replied the young girl. "The brig is a Britisher, and the ship she is fighting is the Red Death."

"What?"

"Here, my dear, stupid Juan," returning the telescope; "look once more, and a little more critically, for yourself."

Pambo slapped his thigh, and burst into an admiring guffaw.

"Missy Carletta don't hab sailed on v'yages wif Cap'n Redbeard time an' time again fur nuffin!" he exclaimed. "Dat am a fac'!"

An hour or two later, when the characteristics of the ships engaged were plainly distinguishable with the naked eye, there was no doubt as to the accuracy of the young girl's decision.

It was also evident that the artillery duel was being carried on, without any perceptible advantage as yet to either side.

Both vessels were apparently being maneuvered with equal skill, and neither as yet seemed to have been seriously crippled, though there was but little intermission in the thunderous booming of their fierce exchanges of both single shots and broadsides.

The witnesses in the long-boat were now within five or six miles of the contestants, and were hesitating as to the wisdom of drawing any nearer when another sail, a mere speck, was descried in the southeast.

"Hurrah!" cried Jack Bobstay; "if that should only prove—"

He did not complete the words just then, but

gave Carletta a swift, joyful glance, and the course of the long-boat was again altered, this time direct toward the new sail!

The stranger, which soon proved to be a schooner, and a remarkably fast sailer at that, was coming directly up to an inspection of the sea-fight on a series of long, sweeping tacks, and as the long-boat was heading for her on the main opposite course, with the stiff wind well upon her starboard quarter, the interval between them rapidly lessened.

Finally, when there could be no further doubt as to the new-comer's identity, Jack Bobstay turned to his companions with a flushing face and kindling eyes.

"It's the Sally Ann!" he exclaimed, with enthusiasm. "Just look at her reach and pay along! Oh, she's the skimmer! There's but one craft on the Atlantic that can beat her on her own best points, and that's the Spankaway. Hurrah!"

And he sprung forward, waving a large piece of spare canvas as a signal.

"Dere's nuffin' in de worl' like bein' born to good-luck," cried Pambo, who was at the tiller, while the dusky faces of both Tola and Matanko, on less than his own, reflected the joyful excitement of the moment. "An' Marse Jack Bobstay an' de chile for luck on salt water, you hear me!"

Carletta had lost no time in joining her lover at the bow.

"How happy you are!" she said, looking smilingly up into his animated face, as he continued to flutter his white banner-like signal.

He clasped her to his breast with his disengaged arm, kissing her sweet face proudly.

"Am I not, and with reason?" he exclaimed.

"What does that cloud of snowy canvas mean, that is bearing down upon us like some proud, majestic bird, with joy and hope upon its rustling wings, my darling? Home, home for Montauk, a privateersman's commission, and a wild cruise for honor and profit, with you as the bride-companion of my glorious career! That is what it means!"

"Ah, I am so happy, Juan!" and in the screening shelter of the bellying sail she blushing responded to his lover's kiss. "But, tell me, what is the Spankaway?"

"The schooner-gem of Marion of the Mists' smuggler fleet, and, let us hope, my privateer of the future," was the proud reply. "But, a little less confidently, 'that will depend no less upon the strange Maid's caprice than upon the progress that may have been made in the war between our American patriots and the domineering British king, who would squeeze taxes, like so much blood-sweat, out of them, for the advantage of his pampered aristocrats, or to help along his war against gallant France, our well-wisher and our friend. For you must know that I am now two years at sea, with scant enough news of what may be going on at home. However, here is the Sally Ann almost within hail, and this is the fairest omen of success I have had since quitting her on the life-raft!"

As soon as Jack's identity could be made out from the on-coming schooner's deck there was a ringing cheer of welcome from her numerous crew.

As the young skipper bounded over her side, a few minutes later, his hands were grasped by his first mate, Tom Halyard, a powerful sea rover of middle age, with honest, weather-beaten features and an eagle eye, while the men came pressing and shouting around him in mingled wonder and delight.

"Welcome back out of the unknown, Captain Jack!" cried the mate. "But, how have you managed it, and who is the señorita? Hallo! there's old Pambo again, as I live!"

"One question at a time, Tom," was the joyous response. "And there's a long yarn to spin."

CHAPTER X.

THE FLAG OF THE FREE.

THE best and greater part of the Sally Ann's cabin accommodations had at once been placed at the disposal of Carletta and her maid.

The young girl was alone in the saloon, looking wonderfully refreshed and beautiful, when Jack Bobstay for the first time rejoined her an hour or two after the schooner had been reached.

"My Juan, at last!" she cried, looking up impatiently. "And have you finally exchanged confidences with your second in command?"

He gayly nodded in the affirmative, drawing her slender figure lovingly to his side.

"Tell me everything!" cried Carletta; "even if you have to do it piece-meal, my Juan."

"Success, joy, homeward-bound, and with perhaps a royal prize to bear us company!" he laughed. "There it is, in condensed form, my darling."

"But I want the particulars!"

"Easily enough supplied."

"In the first place, how has the Sally Ann sped during your absence?"

"Bravely! She is now loaded deep with fixed ammunition, to say nothing of English gold galore, captured ten days ago from a store-ship, which was subsequently burnt. A fair present for the patriot army and navy, eh?"

"Ah, indeed! Then the War of Independence is raging in America already?"

For answer, Jack Bobstay opened a rather bulky roll of bunting which he had brought with him, and with a series of vigorous gestures, fluttered out its folds so that the entire floor of the saloon was more than covered with them.

It was a glorious ensign of alternating broad red and white stripes, with a corner-field of azure bearing a wreath of white stars.

"How beautiful!" cried the young girl, clasping her hands. "What banner is this, Juan?"

"The flag of the free—the national ensign of the American Republic to be!" was the proud response. "Or, at least, it is the germ of the design that will doubtless be ultimately adopted by the Congress; and, in the mean time, it will do to fight our tyrants under, on land or on sea."

"It is a noble design, the stars and the stripes! I would gladly be a man, to fight for freedom and independence under such a banner, Juan!"

"You shall inspire me while I fight under it, at all events," declared Captain Jack, and she assisted him in rolling up the glittering flag again. "Halyard obtained this one of a Yankee privateer that he fell in with, a month ago."

"A privateer? Then the Americans are waging war on sea, also?"

"I should say so! And Halyard has likewise learned that a French fleet is already cruising in the patriot interests in the neighborhood of Montauk! So we should have no difficulty in disposing of our prize-cargo to the Frenchmen for the benefit of the cause."

"This is splendid! Is this cargo the royal prize you spoke of bearing you company northward?"

"No; we're looking for something better still."

"What is it?"

"The English armed brig that was engaged with the Red Death. She has apparently succeeded in beating the pirate off, but now, as we are bearing down upon her, she seems to be practically helpless, and is making signals to speak with us."

"Ah!"

"And, as we have sixty fighting men in our crew, we are in hopes of taking the Britisher by surprise."

"What! after she has so gallantly fought off Redbeard and his horde of sea-wolves?"

"Exactly, my dear. So much the stancher prize may she prove for us!"

At this juncture the saloon was entered by the two mates of the schooner, Tom Halyard and Paul Pennant—the latter a dashing, experienced young adventurer of about Jack's age—who had rigged themselves out in their nattiest toggery in view of a promised introduction to their skipper's beautiful betrothed.

"Captain, we'll be within hail of the brig in a few minutes," said Halyard, when this ceremony was finished, to the no small embarrassment of his comrade and himself, and doubtless to the proportionate secret enjoyment of the señorita.

"All right, my hearties," replied Jack, nonchalantly. "I'm with you. You will come with us, Carletta?"

"Indeed, I will, Capitano Juan!" was the young girl's composed response. "I am enough of a sailor to wish to see everything going on."

When they reached the poop the Britisher was only half a mile away, rocking in seeming helplessness on the sea, with her half-furled sails, her rigging and hull betraying unmistakable evidences of the recent engagement.

Her late antagonist was almost hull-down in the southwest, apparently well enough satisfied to beat a leisurely retreat after the fight which had doubtless been little to the profit of either.

In obedience to Captain Jack's instructions, the majority of the Sally Ann's crew were hidden from view, but armed, and ready, together with the rest, to launch themselves on the brig's decks with hostile intent at the first signal to board.

The schooner ran up the British Union Jack at her gaff as she came within hail.

At a closer view, the brig was seen to have suffered more severely than was at first supposed, while the work of taking care of the wounded and cleaning up decks was still under way.

"What craft is that?" was suddenly roared through a trumpet, by a red-faced, arrogant-looking officer in a cocked hat and big epaulettes, from the brig's poop.

"The loyal schooner Sally Ann, Captain Jack Bobstay, homeward bound," was Jack's responsive hail. "What brig is that?"

"His Majesty's armed brig Salamander, Captain Lord Penrose, on cruise."

"What's the trouble?"

"We've just whipped off a big pirate, and are helpless with a stern-post shot away. Have you any carpenters aboard?"

"Two or three."

"Good! Send us a boat, or lay us aboard, as you choose."

"Thanks, Captain Lord Penrose; we'll choose to lay you aboard."

And Jack turned with a significant smile and some whispered words to his mates, and he laid aside the speaking-trumpet.

"My dear Carletta," he said, in a low voice,

"there may be a little fighting. Perhaps you would do better below."

"My dear Juan," was her composed reply, as she posted herself a little more advantageously for an uninterrupted view of what might follow, "thank you kindly, but I shall prefer to remain right here."

"Lower away with the mainsail!" shouted Halyard, "and stand by to make all fast!"

The rounding-in maneuver was skillfully effected, and then the two vessels were made fast broadside to broadside.

"Mind what you're about there!" peevishly called out the British commander. "If you rub any of our point off with that blasted sharp gunwale-line of yours—"

He was interrupted by a tremendous yell, while nearly the entire ship's company of the schooner poured themselves in a hostile human torrent upon the brig's deck.

CHAPTER XI.

HOMEWARD-BOUND.

H. B. M.'s armed brig *Salamander* was a fine, almost new vessel, of eight guns and one hundred men, less than a quarter of whom had been killed or disabled in her recent encounter with the pirate.

Yet so perfect was the surprise that had been prepared and sprung upon her by the adventurous Sally Ann that in less than five minutes after the attack she was her prisoner of war!

The brig's handful of commissioned officers had alone maintained a brief but desperate resistance, while the majority of the panic-stricken ship's company had given way at the first shock like so many sheep at the shambles.

During this brief resistance, however, Captain Bobstay had the honor of crossing swords with the brig's lordly commander in an individual encounter.

It might have ended badly for the young skipper, who, while thus engaged, was about to be brained from behind by a brandished capstan-bar in the hands of his lordship's second in command, another officer of aristocratic pretensions and herculean frame, who was, however, opportunely shot by a pistol, hastily snatched from the belt of a prostrate man, at the hands of no other than the watchful Carletta herself, whereupon the British captain was speedily overcome and the fight ended.

"It was beastly unfair, you know," growled Lord Penrose, when called upon to yield up his sword a little later on, the brig having already struck her flag. "You announced yourself loyal in response to my first hail."

"So we are loyal, sir!" retorted Captain Jack, sharply.

"Loyal to what?"

"To the Continental Congress and the cause of American Independence!"

The Britisher at once burst into a roaring passion, swearing that he would break his word in twain, or fling it overboard before submitting to the disgrace of yielding it up to such a blatant rebel stripling; and, springing back, he even made a movement as if to throw it over the taffrail, when Jack's cutlass again flashed bare, and its point was pressed threateningly against the other's breast.

"Hold!" shouted the young adventurer. "Yield this instant, Sir Britisher, or die! Which shall it be?"

The Englishman caught his breath and changed countenance.

"I yield to force," he stammered, taking his sword by the blade and presenting the hilt. "Here!"

"Wait!" with an indignant wave of the hand. "You have insulted me, and you shall pay the penalty. Carletta!" And he turned his head.

"Here, my Juan!" and the beautiful girl was at his side in an instant.

"But for you, Carletta, I should not be in my present victorious position, if, indeed, I should retain the breath of life. Honor to whom honor is due! Therefore, receive you this blusterer's sword. Sir Britisher, you will formally yield up your sword to this young lady!"

The haughty Englishman bit his lip and turned pale, while the onlookers of the curious and unusual scene held their breaths.

"To a woman?" he gasped.

"Obey, or—"

And once more the threatening cutlass point bit in through his gorgeously-laced uniform till it drew the blood.

The Britisher was not such a pink of arrogance that he could not make a virtue of necessity when pushed to the wall.

He forced a smile, and then presented his sword to the fair Carletta on his bended knee.

"I don't know who you are," he said, in a scarcely audible voice, "but even honor may stoop in homage to such beauty as yours."

She composedly took the sword, at once returning it with the words:

"Continue to wear it with honor, sir, for I perceive by my young captain's face that he deems his honor satisfied."

This ended the scene, though Jack did not altogether like the look of bold and intense admiration in the Englishman's face as he accept-

ed the courteous return of his sword with a profound obeisance.

Among the crew captured with the brig were twenty-eight pressed American seamen, who were only too glad to join the Sally Ann's ship's company.

The repairs on the *Salamander* were finished during the same day. Then a prize-crew was put aboard under Paul Pennant's command, and victor and captive proceeded northward in each other's company.

They had exceptionally propitious weather. After a ten-days' prosperous sail, without the intervention of any noteworthy incident, they were so fortunate as to fall in with the French fleet of twelve sail, under the Count de Rochambeau, between Montauk Point and Block Island.

The prize and prisoners were at once turned over to the charge of the French admiral in the name of the Continental Congress. The formalities of this transfer rendered a visit to Newport, Rhode Island (then in the hands of the Americans), necessary, in company with the flag ship, before the adventurers could think of even communicating with their homes and friends at East Hampton and thereabouts; and while at that port the valuable prize-cargo of the Sally Ann was also placed in the hands of the patriot military authorities.

Here a delay of a week or more, incidental to the appraisal of the captured property, the disposition of the prisoners, and, finally, the allotment of the prize-money among the patriot rovers, caused the fame of their exploits to go before them through the length and breadth of the struggling colonies like a chain of watch-fires, flashing forth new hope and encouragement to the patriot cause on every hand.

It was finally, with full pockets and fuller hearts, that the adventurers made their landing at Sag Harbor, after their long and uncertain cruise of more than two years.

The welcome given them by the inhabitants can better be imagined than described.

Every man of them found himself more or less a hero: bonfires blazed; festivities were the order of the day; there was scarcely any end to the honors that were ready or in preparation on every hand; while, better than all, it was known that a resolution of thanks had already been voted by the Congress, and that one of General Washington's aids was on his way from the army in northern New Jersey to Montauk for the purpose of obtaining the particulars of the Sally Ann's exploits, with a view to commissioning a continuance thereof, or similar ones, on a more extensive scale; and it was even hinted that the aide would be accompanied on his mission by a distinguished French nobleman, who could be none other than the illustrious and self-sacrificing La Fayette, but recently commissioned a major-general in the army under Washington.

But Jack Bobstay, for one, was in too much anxious haste to rejoin his mother and foster-sister in East Hampton, and to render an account of himself to the Maid of Montauk, to care at first for the celebrations of which he might have been so justly the chief recipient.

Accordingly, at daybreak of the day following the arrival at Sag Harbor he proceeded ashore with Carletta and her maid, for the brief journey overland to East Hampton, for which Tom Halyard had already engaged the conveyance.

Pambo and Matanko were also to accompany Jack's party, while it was generally agreed that there should be a general gathering of all the original members of the Sally Ann's crew at the Round House of Marion of the Mists at the point on the following day.

While they were being rowed in from the schooner by a shore-boat at this early hour, Jack's professional eye was attracted by a large and singularly beautiful schooner lying near the wharf.

She seemed to have been newly painted and fresh-rigged, and yet there was no sign of life aboard, while the general appearance of the vessel, in spite of her trimness, conveyed the impression that she was waiting for something in her outfit.

"What schooner is that?" demanded the young commander of the boatman, who was an old acquaintance.

"What, Captain Jack, don't you recognize her?" was the reply. "However, the Spankaway is somewhat disguised in her new toggery, and they haven't got the gilt for the new lettering on her stern as yet."

"The Spankaway?"

"Nothing less, old fellow!"

Jack's eyes sparkled, and he exchanged a proud look with Carletta, who was at his side.

"Good!" he exclaimed. "She is as bright as she deserves to be—as a Queen of the Sea, jeweled and gold-clothed for her coronation. But what is she waiting for?"

"For her guns and crew. Marion of the Mists declares that she shall only be fitted out at her individual expense, which it seems she cannot at present afford."

Jack pressed Carletta's hand, and then tapped his bosom where was concealed the metal case containing the mysterious parchment.

"Marion may feel more like affording it after she sees me," he said, quietly. "Carletta, my love, cheer up! you are soon to meet a mother and a sister."

CHAPTER XII.

THE MAID OF MONTAUK.

AN hour later on, after a brisk hour's drive through the pine woods, by cultivated lands and over sandy tracts, which included and bordered a primitive region where the Montauk and Shinnecock tribes of Indians were still in undisturbed possession, Jack and his party arrived at Dame Bobstay's cottage at East Hampton.

The village had been settled by the English a hundred years previously, and was, at the time of the events here recorded, much the same quiet, thrifty, God-fearing little community it remains at the present day.

The news of the young hero's arrival had preceded him, but he escaped the public reception prepared for him and drove directly to his mother's house, where he was speedily in the good woman's arms, while Carletta's welcome was scarcely less heartfelt than his own.

"And is this the beautiful bride you have brought from over seas, my son?" exclaimed Dame Bobstay, gazing long and earnestly in Carletta's sweet face, when breakfast had been discussed and the young girl had been made to feel herself comparatively at home. "How lovely you are, my child, and how richly dressed! Your folks must be of great consequence in the foreign place from which you come."

Carletta and Aileen, whose blonde beauty was in marked contrast with the former's brunette charms, were standing together, their arms interlaced, the dusky Tola being in the background.

Perceiving that his betrothed was still more or less embarrassed, Jack hastened to say in reply:

"My dear mother, Carletta will have much to tell you of her individual history later on. But you must give her ample time to grow acquainted with her new surroundings. It will require but short space, judging by the progress Aileen and she are already making."

"We shall be as sisters, I know that, brother Jack," responded Aileen, simply, and the young girls again embraced. "But now, suppose you give us some account of your own two years' wanderings and adventures?"

"Time enough for that, after I shall have paid my first respects to Marion of the Mists," replied the young commander. "Tell me, have you seen much of the strange woman, of late?"

"Even less than formerly," Dame Bobstay took it upon herself to reply. "Her followers are few now, many of them having drifted off to the wars, and she keeps herself more distant and impenetrable than ever before, though I doubt not that she is already rejoicing over the news of your return."

A little later on Jack, accompanied solely by Pambo, was proceeding eastward by water for the lone house at the Point, twenty-five miles away.

As he at last drew into the well-remembered smuggler's cove, now seeming deserted and forlorn, a white-robed, stately figure issued from the rough-built, castle-like building perched on the rock above, on the site which is at the present day occupied by the lighthouse, and came down to the strand to meet him.

It was the strange recluse of the sea-girt wild, Marion of the Mists, herself.

Jack sprung to shore, and bent his lips over the white hand that was extended to him, while Pambo, quickly making the boat fast, also drew near with an expression of awe in his ebony visage.

She was, as Jack had stated to Carletta, a tall and singularly beautiful woman, who might be of almost any age between twenty-five and forty, and with a statue-like coldness of face and mien.

"You are come to me at last, my friend," she said, in a low, measured, but musical voice. "And there is Pambo, too. Welcome, old follower!"

And the white hand was likewise extended for the gigantic negro's kiss.

Then, bidding Pambo remain, she led the way for the young sailor past the opening into the Smuggler's Cave and up a rocky path to her tower, about the door of which several Indians were mending their fishing-nets in the sun, and thence on into a large chamber overlooking the vast lonely expanse of the sea, which Jack remembered well.

Here, sinking into a luxurious seat by the open window, she signaled her companion to be seated, and then, without a word, sat waiting, with her large, somber gray eyes fixed upon his face.

He understood her mood, and at once entered upon a detailed account of his adventures.

It was a long story, but was listened to throughout without an interrupting word.

But as he finished a somewhat troubled look—a look of weariness or disappointment—came into the hushed beauty of the passionate face.

"Nothing of Gascoyne!" she murmured.

"Nothing but the vague hints I have been able to give you, Marion," replied the young sailor. "I doubt not but he is dead long since, and the traitorous Perez, too, for that matter."

"You are mistaken," was the calm reply. "Gascoyne would not die without seeing me, Marion, again; and the villain, Perez, could not, without closing his long account with me."

"Strange, and, I fear, over-confident words, Marion!" replied the young man, wonderingly. "What can you mean?"

"My son, that I shall show you with but little delay. But first give me the case containing the mysterious parchment."

He obeyed.

Something as near like exultation as her emotionless face seemed capable of came into it as she unfolded the parchment, and bent her gaze upon its cabalistic tracings.

"It is the true key!" she exclaimed, at last. "My son, for all that Gascoyne is still lost to me, thou hast indeed done well and nobly!"

She gravely kissed him on the forehead, as he remembered her to have done but once before, when she was sending him away on his long voyage in the Sally Ann.

Then she touched a bell at her side. An Indian boy appeared, to whom she gave a significant sign, whereupon he vanished.

"Now, Jack, come with me," she arose, taking the young man's arm. "There are two things I must show you at once."

She conducted him into a passage, at one end of which a series of stone steps led down. He recognized them as the interior communication between the domicile and the vast system of caves honeycombing the rock beneath. The steps continued down several flights, the obscurity being lighted by occasional iron lamps set in the rocky walls at intervals, and seemingly never ceasing to burn. At the foot of the first flight stood the Indian page in waiting as they descended.

He conducted them along a side passage, drew the bolt from over a strong door set in the rock, opened it, and stepped respectfully back.

Marion and her companion entered a cavern cell, or strong-room, lighted by a narrow, grated opening showing flashes of sky and sea.

A chained prisoner started up from a low pallet, and glared at them questioningly.

Jack Bobstay was astounded.

"Perez!" he exclaimed.

The prisoner's sole response on his part was a muttered oath, after which he placed himself on a stool that stood, together with a small rough table, in the niche of the casement opening, and gazed savagely at the intruders.

Marion had, on her part, merely turned to her companion with a strange smile, as much as to say:

"Was I so over-confident, as you deemed, especially with regard to this particular man?"

She quietly produced the mysterious parchment, opened and held it before the prisoner's staring eyes with a singularly mocking expression in her face.

Perez started, glared at the characters, clasped his temples with his clinched hands, and then fell back with a groan.

"The key—the treasure key!" he gasped, despairingly. "No hope! no hope!"

"But there is still hope for thee, Perez, if thou wilt seize it," said Marion, returning the parchment to her bosom. "Speak! Now wilt thou disclose to me the fate of Gascoyne, the Adventurer?"

He made a furious gesture.

"Never!" resolutely.

The white, beautiful face was momentarily convulsed, after which it was as marble again.

She signed to her companion, and they silently quitted the cavern-cell.

The page closed the heavy door behind them, shooting the bolt, and the prisoner was once more shut in his living tomb.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE TOP OF THE TOWER.

ON regaining the top of the subterranean steps the beautiful recluse dismissed her attendant page with a gesture.

"Come!" she said, to her companion.

She next personally conducted him up a broader stone staircase until they reached a last landing at the door of a room occupying the entire lofty summit of the tower.

Here, while producing a key, she turned to the youth, her entire face and mien unexpectedly softening.

"You remember this room, my friend?"

"Perfectly, Marion," was the reply. "It is the great signal-room, from which you were wont to signal with various flags or lanterns your brave followers when still far away at sea."

To his amazement, she threw her white arms about him, pressing him to her bosom with a grand, maternal air, her eyes mellowing, a great enthusiasm flinging its ruddy banners into her marble cheeks.

"My son, my son!" she exclaimed; "didst deem that I have not joyed in your late heroism in our country's cause, in that I have thus de-

layed to demonstrate it? Behold, then! A change has come over the ancient signal room, no less than over my melancholy soul. It shall speak for itself."

She released him, unfastening and flinging open the door.

Jack Bobstay paused at the threshold, with an exclamation of wonder and delight.

It was an immense, lofty, eight-sided apartment, with several tall, narrow windows, and it was, indeed, metamorphosed from what he remembered it in the old days.

Then it had been a sort of rude lumber-room, unkempt, not particularly sweet-smelling, and with a more or less confused litter of lanterns, flags and other paraphernalia for sea-signaling on floor and walls.

Now the windows were draped and the walls festooned with the glittering national bunting of the infant New World Republic—the glorious Stars and Stripes—in its 'primitive design. The drapings were caught up at regular intervals by glittering combinations of naval small-arms—cutlasses, steel-headed pikes, hatchets, carbines, pistols, daggers, studded belts, and the like.

Stacks of these also rose from different portions of the floor; and even the rafters overhead were hung with the same gorgeous banner folds.

"Oh, Marion!" exclaimed the young sailor, at last; "here, then, is revealed one of the secrets of your mysterious past—your patriotic aspirations of a free and independent America! Speak! am I not right?"

Her radiant and transfigured face and mien were a sufficient answer in themselves, but still her lips made response.

"My friend, it is true!" she cried. "My private wrongs have been wrought by a titled Englishman—a representative of the aristocracy and kingcraft which every child of liberty abhors. My revenge is hereafter merged in the cause of America and Freedom! What else does this apartment signify to you?"

"I know not."

"I will tell you, then. But stay; you doubtless saw that queen-craft, the Spankaway, at Sag Harbor?"

"I did—a beauty of the deep to witch the sailor's heart!"

"But incomplete as yet?"

"Yes, awaiting her armament, I was told."

"True. A part of it is here. Her cannon and ammunition are at my command in one of the French battle-ships now in our waters. I could have had all this on credit or as a gift, had I so chosen. But no; the Spankaway must be the individual gift to the Republic of Marion Merrivale—Marion of the Mists, the Maid of Montauk, the erstwhile smuggler queen. Ha, ha, ha!" She laughed wildly. "And now that the pirates' buried treasures are at my command, I shall dispatch the brave schooner at once to receive her guns. The price shall be paid in full, hereafter. My friend, all else is prepared. In three days' time the queen privateer of the sea shall be in commission to career among the British marine like a besom of destroying fire, and you, Captain Jack, will command her!"

The youth was thrilled by her enthusiasm, no less than by her wild beauty, which he had theretofore supposed as emotionless as chiseled stone, or which he had never conceived of under the extravagant aspect before.

He pressed her hand to his lips, and, in the fullness of his gratitude, would have flung himself at her feet, but that she restrained him.

"None of this, my friend!" she exclaimed.

"Make thy homage to me henceforth in the deeds of emprise which thou mayst write in blood and flame upon tyrant England's crest—I scorn aught else. Listen! To-morrow thou must be here to meet an illustrious foreign gentleman, with whom I have long been in secret correspondence. He is my friend, as he is the friend of Liberty. He will accompany one of General Washington's aides, to confer with you in the interest of his chief. Weeks ago I advised Washington of your prospective arrival."

"Weeks ago!" repeated the astonished youth.

"Marion, how could you have done this?"

She smiled mysteriously, having once more grown composed and pale.

"By second-sight," she answered. "It is my gift. But no more of this. Thou wilt come?"

"To hear is to obey."

"Come early, then; and yet another surprise shall be in store for thee. I have already communicated with the French fleet. Now accompany me yet again."

She led him through the stately banner-room to a narrow little staircase in one corner, by which they ascended to the level stone-flagged roof of the tower.

A lofty bare flagstaff arose from one of the battlemented sides, firmly cemented into the parapet. The mast was duly rigged, however, and at its lower end was the bunting weather-box.

"Aha!" cried Jack; "the stout old staff, from which so often as a boy you permitted me, Marion, to run up the red general flag as a signal of safety for smuggler and fisher alike in your wide service!"

She smiled, the soft sea-shell flush again

transiently flashing into her exquisite but commanding face.

"The red flag of the *contrabandista* is out of date, Jack," she replied. "I have reserved for you the proud honor of first running up the standard that must forever more flaunt in its place on this ancient turret—whether reared by Norse sea-kings' hands, or by some other warlike race lost in the mists of tradition, it is not given mortal man to know—or at least until the ocean tyrant may batter down the tower from their grinning three-deckers, when my bones shall go down among the fragments, together with the flag of my aspirations and my love! Open the box, and give to the universal sea-breeze the bunting that you will find housed therein, and already attached to the running gear."

The young sailor obeyed with eager impetuosity, and, a moment later, the new and immortal flag among the nations of the earth—the Stars and Stripes of the great Republic to be—floated out magnificently, a gorgeous meteor of hopeful significance for the down-trodden races of humanity for ages to come, from the lofty peak of the battlement-mast!

The mysterious woman's face flushed anew, and her bright eyes gleamed. With her lofty and commanding mien, she seemed the goddess, or fit feminine personation, of that red-capped Liberty under whose floating new ensign she stood, and whose classic lineaments were destined to stamp the coins of the greatest Republic, no less than the greatest Nation, the world has ever seen, to reappear yearly, glorified, in the pageants of its free millions, and to front the sea-world at the entrance of its proudest port in the most colossal statuary ideal of human achievement as her Genius enlightening the World.

She made a grand gesture comprehensive of her vast surroundings of sea and shore, earth, ocean, air, and then, with another significant sign, they both knelt in voiceless prayer.

It was the dedication of their lives to the Banner of the Free!

CHAPTER XIV.

THE SECRETS OF A GREAT HEART.

"Come!" said the Maid of Montauk; "it is enough. Thou shalt partake of of the mid-day meal with me, my friend, my compatriot; for there is much more that I would say to thee at present."

Jack followed her down from the roof and through the ancient but unstoried tower.

They passed through various passages and rooms which had been familiar to him in the past, chiefly by reason of their rich and antique furniture and appointments, and which had never ceased to excite his wonder as to whence, when and how she had managed to transport them to that forlorn shelter on the sea-fronting brow of the savage wilderness.

But at last the Indian page was made to reappear, and she conducted her guest into a room on the lower floor which he had never entered, if indeed he had ever so much as suspected its existence before.

A wonderful richly-tapestried banquetting-hall, with a long table decked with gold and silver plate in profusion, as if in preparation for a bridal feast.

"Come!" said Marion, gently.

She calmly occupied a throne-like seat at one end, signed him to a similar one at her right hand; then there was silence while the page and yet another Indian attendant passed mutely to and from a small adjoining room, supplying them with various dishes of plain but deliciously-cooked food. Then flasks of wine were brought, and at a sign from the mistress of the tower the attendants disappeared.

"Let us eat and drink," continued Marion, yet more benignantly. "It is well that we should."

She set her young guest the example by brimming a couple of silver beakers with the red wine from one of the flasks, and they began to discuss the meal.

"This table is always preserved in the state that you now behold," Marion observed, at last. "Do you know why—or can you guess?"

Jack shook his head.

"It was thus set, years ago, for my marriage feast—for my marriage with Gascoyne, the adventurer."

"Marion, my noble benefactress and friend," replied the young sailor, when he had sufficiently recovered from his surprise, "let me hope that the feast shall not have been set in vain—that the ceremony that was so cruelly interrupted may yet be consummated."

A great sadness came into the beautiful face and eyes, and yet there was something childlike in the simplicity of the smile which came into them at last.

"Why not?" she said, softly. "At all events I can hope. Why should not Gascoyne, the beloved, return unto my arms, even as truly as Perez, the hated, was wafted back unto my vengeance? At all events, I can but wait, wait! The bride shall be forthcoming," with unconscious pathos, "even—even if Death must first give her away at the altar with the child stateliness of his fathering kiss."

"Marion—benefactress and dearest friend!" said the young man, earnestly.

"What is it, my son?"

"You call me your son, and I am glad. You even honor me at last with your confidence."

"Eternal, everlasting secrecy is so lonely, my son! Besides, I know that you will not betray my confidence."

"Indeed, you must know that—I would die first! But, since you honor me thus far, why not to the full?"

"To the full? What is it thou wouldst know, my friend?"

"Many things, dear friend," replied her guest, boldly. "First, who and what was Gascoyne, and whence came he to this wild spot, with his fair, bright face and laughing eyes, that so oddly consorted with his silence and mystery as to his antecedents?"

"He came from England," Marion replied, after a long pause. "More than this I must not say at present—not even to you, my friend."

"Well, then, as to this darker and equally mysterious Perez?"

Her brow clouded.

"He belongs to me and to vengeance!" she exclaimed, peremptorily. "Say no more of him!"

"But he was supposed to be on his death-bed when he made confession and gave up the precious parchment to the unfortunate Bishop of Porto Bello. How came he into your toils at last, Marion?"

"No more of this—not now, at least! The hour is not ripe, my son. Tell me of your beautiful bride from the pirate's isle, instead. You are to bring her with you to see me to-morrow, are you not?"

"Certainly, if you wish it, Marion."

"I do wish it. And bring Aileen, too. But as to the fair Carletta?"

"She is fair in that she is beautiful—beautiful as a dream, Marion. Otherwise, Carletta is not fair, as one might speak of Aileen, or of your gracious self, Marion."

"Ah! one of the twilight beauties—a brunette?"

"With respect to her hair and eyes—which are of lustrous midnight blackness—yes; and yet with a pure pallor of the skin that reminds one of an alabaster lamp; or, when she chances to blush, of the delicate pink of the sea-shell, with a faint hint of the olive or purpling deeps from which it takes its mysterious tenderness and tone."

"A lover's description! What is the girl's history?"

"She has none that she knows of. Her earliest recollections are of the pirate community at San Christophe. But, she feels certain that she was originally taken from abroad—that she cannot be the orphaned child of an only sister of Redbeard's, as he would have had her believe. That is all."

Marion gave a slight sudden start.

"Speak!" she exclaimed, in a low, thrilling voice. "Are the girls alike or akin in feature? Aileen and your Carletta, I mean?"

Then the young sailor started in his turn.

"Strange!" he murmured. "It never occurred to me but at this instant, but there is a resemblance."

"Ha! which, if either, might be the elder?"

"I know not. Carletta is doubtless as ignorant of her own exact age as Aileen is of hers."

"But judging by their looks?"

"I have never thought of this before," Jack hesitated. "But I should take them to be of about the same age—eighteen or nineteen."

Marion lapsed into a troubled reverie.

"Should or could Fate have contrived it thus?" she murmured, as if thinking aloud. "But no—but no; it cannot be hoped for!" And then, with another start, a sudden suspicion seemed to rouse her. "My son," she continued, hurriedly, "you spoke of the British commander, whom you forced to yield up his sword to this girl, being instantly and strangely impressed with her aspect?"

"Ay, with her beauty, as a matter of course," sneeringly. "Trust any one of the accursed arrogant aristocrats for that much!"

"Yes, yes; have it thus, then. But you have not mentioned this officer's name to me as yet."

"Penrose."

Marion sunk back, glaring at him wildly, her hand pressed to her heart.

"Penrose!" she repeated, falteringly. "You are sure?"

"Heavens! what is the matter, my friend? Yes; there is no doubt as to the name."

"A nobleman, eh, no less than a commander?"

"Yes; Lord Arthur Penrose is the Britisher's full title. A proudly handsome but sinister-looking man of more than middle age. He is still a prisoner on the French admiral's flagship, I suppose."

"The same, the same! What, and after all these concealing years?" Then she managed to compose herself, and as the repast was ended, she hurriedly arose, signing him to do likewise. "Forget all this, but do not forget to-morrow, my friend," she continued, as they passed out of the memorial banquet hall together. "Come!"

Numbers of her Montauk and Shinnecock followers were grouped on the rock as they issued out of the tower, and then a little French midshipman, in a ridiculously huge chapeau stepped up and presented Marion with a letter.

"From monsieur, the admiral, mademoiselle," he said, in French (of which Jack had picked up something more than a mere smattering) with a low bow. "I am to await a verbal answer."

"Thanks, monsieur," she replied. "Allow me." And she signed Jack to step apart with her as she broke the seal of the missive.

There were a dozen close-written lines or more, but she seemed to master them at a single startled glance.

Then she clutched the young sailor's arm.

"Away, my friend!" she exclaimed. "And when you come with the two girls to-morrow, let it be with a numerous armed party of your late fellow-adventurers, and by land."

"I shall obey, Marion," replied the astonished youth. "But vouchsafe to tell me why."

"Lord Penrose has escaped! More than that, he is supposed to have joined and made common cause with a mysterious, presumably piratical craft only last night."

He would willingly have demanded more, but she waved him away impatiently.

Wondering and amazed, he rejoined Pambo on the beach.

CHAPTER XV.

MARION'S ILLUSTRIOUS FRIEND.

FOR that quiet locality in those primitive days it was an unusually large horseback party that started from Amagansett (then as now a small sea-side hamlet two miles eastward of East Hampton), for Marion's tower on the extreme eastern head of Montauk Point, twenty-five miles away, early on the following morning.

For the first five miles or so, until the high, rolling and treeless region of Montauk Point proper was reached, it was moreover (as it is at the present day, unless the wind chances to blow freshly in the rider's face), a miserably-uncomfortable warm-weather route; the connecting strip, Napeague Beach—a long, low, sandy stretch, with the open Atlantic on one hand, Peconic Bay on the other, and frequently submerged altogether by the dashing waves in seasons of storm—being quite as famous for the horrors of its mosquito-swarms among the earlier settlers as with tourists in that still comparatively remote locality at this later day.

But it was a high-spirited party, consisting, besides the two young ladies under Jack Bobstay's individual escort, of a dozen or more of the Sally Ann's late ship's company, including the two mates, all with full pockets and yet fuller hearts over their late celebrations; the wind did come from the right quarter on this occasion—fresh and strong from the east, and consequently full in their faces, to the confusion of the mosquito pests. Dreaded Napeague was soon passed, with its heavy, loose sands, while, as they began to rise over the smooth, high-rolling, grassy sweeps, with the lesser of the two great fresh-water ponds on their left, the still freshening sea-wind blew over them with a benison and a zest.

"It isn't for nothing that we've taken possession of pretty much all the spare horseflesh between Sag Harbor and Amagansett," cried Paul Pennant, who was riding next to Aileen, with whom he was undisguisedly in love—and had been since she was little more than a child. "There'll be high old doings at the Point to-day."

"True enough!" observed Tom Halyard. "By land or by boat, all the rest of our Sally Anners ought to have reached there by this, and I doubt if there'll be a man of our old comrades absent, white, black or red. It should be a proud day for Marion of the Mists. How was our beautiful mistress appearing, Captain Jack?"

"As always—beautiful and mysterious," was the rather short reply of the young commander, who had been more or less puzzled and thoughtful since his extraordinary interview of the preceding day. "However, she is expecting us."

"And what can be the surprise she hinted at as having in store for you?"

"I cannot say."

"I'll bet my head it has something to do with the Spankaway!" interposed Pennant. "At all events, she slipped out of Sag Harbor Bay last evening so quietly that no one could tell how or when she went. Ah, but she's the beauty for sore eyes!"

Here the entire party came to a halt at the top of a particularly lofty rise of ground, and then Carletta reined her steed a little closer to her lover's side as an involuntary cheer burst from most of the masculine throats at the wild beauty of the scene outspread before them.

The entire Point rolled away like a topographical map, with the sparkling sea on either side, the romantic tower sharply defined far away against the brilliant sky, and beyond that four or five stately battle-ships, bending and bowing o'er the billowy swells of the dangerous offing.

"Hurrah!" shouted Pennant. "It's part of the French admiral's fleet. High honors for the old Point, eh, boys? But hallo! what's that?"

Then a momentary, somewhat awesome hush fell upon the whole party.

There had grown out from behind a large fleecy cloud on the far sea-line to the south the remote but distinct apparition of a large ship, whose topsails had at this juncture caught the full burst of the morning sunlight, so that their natural hue was vividly perceptible.

Far from being of the accustomed snowy hue of ship's canvas, those topsails were of a lurid, glowing red, which, for a moment, showed like a blot of blood upon the horizon wall ere vanishing again behind it, to be seen no more.

"The twin pirate ship—the Red Death!" faltered Carletta, seizing her lover's arm. "Should she not be far away in the tropics?—can she have tracked us hither?—what can it mean?"

Every one else had recognized the distinctive mark of the sister pirate ship, whose topsails, no less than her hull, were capriciously kept of the one sanguinary hue.

Jack made some laughing and reassuring remark, whose truth he was far from feeling, and then, as the ride over the breezy hills was resumed, the ominous nature of the vision in the sky was presently more or less forgotten.

There was the boom of a cannon as they approached the Round House, and then a large number of the wild crew of the headland, white and red, who were gathered about the tower, saluted them with welcoming cheers.

Marion was standing at the main entrance, amid a group of dusky Indian maids and others.

She was clothed all in white, her ordinary wear, and was looking like a queen.

Two officers in the uniform of the Continental Army were seen to be likewise in the gate, as she stepped forward, alone, to greet the now dismounting new-comers.

How proud they were of their queenly mistress of the lone headland, and how they loved her!

Tears stood on many a bronzed cheek at the joy of meeting her yet again.

She first saluted the young girls, whom, with a gesture, she consigned to the care of her Indian maids, and then passed gracefully among the group, with a welcoming swift hand-pressure and a varied word or two of home-greeting for each.

Then, taking Jack Bobstay by the arm, she led him up to the two officers.

The first of these, a soldierly-looking man of middle age, was introduced as Colonel Morton, *Aide de Camp in Chief* to General Washington.

His companion—a singularly graceful and noble-looking young man of distinguished but benevolent aspect—then stepped smilingly forward, holding out his hands, with a few words of imperfect English, which he quickly substituted for as many more of polite French.

Marion mentioned a name which was already dear to every patriotic American heart, and the young commander not only grasped the extended hand with a flushing cheek, but in spite of a deprecating gesture on its owner's part, respectfully raised it to his lips.

Then he turned to his comrades and mentioned a name, which was forthwith repeated in a simultaneous cheer from every throat—the name of LA FAYETTE!

The cheer was taken up by the others who came flocking about the little esplanade in their rough but picturesque seafaring garb, and the young nobleman, together with Colonel Morton, was soon sufficiently at home with the adventurous band.

Then a salute came booming in from the sea, and Marion of the Mists called the attention of all, but of Jack Bobstay in particular, to a beautiful vessel that had suddenly appeared in the offing among the stately battle-ships, and from whose stern the smoke of the still reverberating salute was lightly up-curling.

It was a large and graceful schooner, thoroughly fitted for a war-cruise, and of such perfect proportions as to elicit a fresh and enthusiastic cheer from those sailor hearts.

"My son," said Marion, a proud flush coming into her exquisite face, "it is the Spankaway. Her guns and provisions are on board. She but awaits her commander and her crew."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE SPANKAWAY.

JACK could at first scarcely believe the evidence of his delighted senses.

"But, Marion, how can this be?" he exclaimed. "Surely you cannot have had time to perform all this since I last conferred with you?"

"Don't be too sure of that," was Marion's smiling response. "Does not the schooner yonder speak for herself?"

"Ah, my dear young captain!" cried Monsieur De La Fayette, gayly; "you cannot even yet imagine the miracles that our fair and mysterious hostess of this strange tower is capable of—with the necessary money, influence and intelligence. In France she would be styled *une belle sorcière*—a beautiful magician, as you would say—while here it should be enough for

all of you, her followers, that she is simply your witch of the waves!"

"And, to make the vision yet more substantial to your understanding, Captain Bobstay," interposed Colonel Morton, stepping forward, "here is a document of which I am the bearer in trust from General Washington and the Congress at Philadelphia for yourself."

He forthwith presented a formidable-looking document, with a great seal, which the young man hurriedly opened.

"It is our letter-of-marque commission!" he shouted, turning to his comrades and flourishing the parchment over his head. "My friends, the fortunes of the deep are at our command for the risking. Which of you are with me in the Spankaway, letter-of-marque privateer?"

Every Sally-Anner responded, and there were more in plenty to make up the schooner's full complement, which, it was understood, would call for one hundred men.

Jack now drew apart to talk over his adventures with Monsieur De La Fayette and Colonel Morton, while Marion withdrew with her young lady visitors, and the crowd variously dispersed to their enjoyment, not the least feature in which was a huge pipe of Canary wine which was being broached on the beach for their entertainment by the young marquis's sailor escort from the French flagship.

When Jack had told his story, and received the personal congratulations of his distinguished auditors, Marion came out of the tower, unaccompanied, to make her adieux to the latter, who were under orders to rejoin General Washington in New Jersey at the earliest moment.

Indeed, the entire appearance of the French fleet on this part of the coast was but temporary, by reason of the collection of a superior British naval force for the time being in that vicinity, and it was understood that it would set sail for southern waters on that day.

Colonel Morton made his parting acknowledgments to the fair recluse of the tower in a bluff, soldierly manner, but those of the young marquis were accorded with a distinction and *impresment* that could not but increase the young commander's wonder at her importance with personages high in influence and power, together with a speculation as to the sterling, if perhaps secret, worth and services with which she had doubtless attained to that distinction.

The gallant Frenchman sunk upon one knee, and raised Marion's beautiful white hand to his lips with true Old World chivalry and reverence.

"Beautiful and mysterious divinity of the idea of popular and political liberty in this young New World, which we in older France are doubtless on the threshold of emulating!" he murmured, rising slowly, with his hand to his heart; "in bidding thee adieu, I take away with me an ineffaceable impression of your personal goodness and beauty, no less than the liveliest hopefulness for that republican and human cause in whose service we have both dedicated our fortunes and our lives. *Belle Marion aux Brouillards! Mystérieuse Vierge de ce Promontoire sauvage de la Mer!*" (Fair Marion of the Mists! Weird Maiden of this wild Headland of the Sea!) "adieu. And may we both live to behold the sun of liberty, now rising in blood, soar to a peaceful meridian with the achievement of independent republicanism for America and France, as twin beacon lights for the hopes and aspirations of mankind in free nations yet to be!"

Apart from their polite extravagance, this sentiment was a sufficiently bold avowal for that period, in view of King Louis XVI. being still fixed upon the French throne with seeming security, though with the warnings of the Revolution and Reign of Terror to come already muttering menacingly in the enlarging storm-cloud of the future.

In acknowledgment, Marion murmured a few gracious words of farewell in as pure and liquid a French as those to which she responded.

Then, with a last hearty hand-grasp for Captain Jack, the distinguished visitors took their leave.

Marion and the young commander were left alone, but she drew him yet further along the natural esplanade, whence the animated scenes along the beach below and upon the sea beyond were in plain view.

"You saw the red apparition in the cloud this morning?" she asked.

"We all saw it," replied Jack, in a troubled voice.

"I was the only one that noted it from this point," she continued. "And I now speak of it for the first time."

"The Red Death here upon our very coast!" exclaimed Jack; "and this is in conjunction with Lord Penrose's significant escape from the French flagship! Marion, what can all this portend?"

"Devastation to us," was the ominous response, "together with the plucking of both Aileen and your sweet Carletta from out our keeping, if we are not sleeplessly on our guard."

He gave her a startled look.

"What!" he cried; "would this titled Eng-

lishman—who is also an officer in the British Navy—venture to make an alliance with such a notoriously professed pirate as Redbeard?"

"Yes—on occasion. What, pray, will not our accursed British tyrants venture upon in the present hostilities? Will the authority that openly arms the bloodthirsty savages of our interior, and incites them to our massacre, as an auxiliary to their military operations against our liberties, hesitate to enlist, on occasion, even red-handed piracy in their cause as against us on the seas and coast?"

"Well, look here, Marion," replied the young man, slowly, "that isn't so clear. A pirate is a universal outlaw, you know—an enemy of all mankind."

"So is any despot, for that matter. But to the point. The English lord has struck hands with the pirate chief—and, if the latter should be induced to war solely upon England's enemies, Penrose can be trusted for receiving the tacit support of his Government."

"That is clearer."

"And yet clearer must be the common determination that would cement such a union between them."

"Marion, what is that common object?"

"My destruction, the possession of Aileen and Carletta, and to forestall our seizure of the buried treasure."

He gazed at her in increased amazement.

"All this," he said, "I can understand, at least in part, with respect to Redbeard. But why should Lord Penrose likewise desire your destruction, for instance?"

"We are enemies to the death, though once it may have been otherwise. I shall tell you no more."

"But why should he likewise desire the possession of the girls?"

"That must remain a mystery to you still—for the present." Then she murmured, as if involuntarily, aloud, and in a tone of anguish: "Oh, Gascoyne, Gascoyne! why are you not here, with your indomitable arm and lion's heart, in this bitter pass?"

The young man's face flushed, and he seized her hand.

"Away with all this mystery, Marion!" he cried; "or retain it as you may. Am I not here at your side? Enough for me to know that the dear girls and yourself are in danger! What am I to do?"

"Ah, that is what I like, my son!" and she gazed confidently into the brave, flushed face.

"Quick, then; muster your crew for the Spankaway. No time must be lost; you must be off in her this very day."

"This very day?"

"Truly. See; the French fleet are already winging for the far south. After that, our coast is at the mercy of the English men-of-war, or of the Red Death, as the case may be. Aileen and Carletta shall remain with me in the tower, and enough of my bold followers will remain to beat off a shore attack. You still hesitate. Why do you hesitate?"

CHAPTER XVII.

GOOD-BY, SWEETHEART!

"MARION," said Jack, with much embarrassment, "I confess to you that this command of the Spankaway realizes one of my fondest dreams. But I had also hoped that Carletta would accompany me as my bride."

"That may not be, my son," replied the recluse. "An initial cruise is necessary. When you return from that, in say a month's time, she shall be yours, and as my additional gift at the altar."

"Oh, Marion! why not now?"

"It must not be. The girl's safety is as dear to me as to yourself. Ask not wherefore, but submit."

"So be it, then," he replied, with a heavy sigh. Then, glancing seaward, the enthusiasm blazed in his blue eyes afresh. "Why, how is this?" he cried. "The Spankaway is anchored, and boatfuls of men are already going out to her."

"They are her crew. Halyard and Pennant have been all the morning selecting them under my instructions. In an hour's time you should hoist anchor, and away."

"So soon?"

"It cannot be too soon for the initial work in hand."

"Good, then. What are your instructions for me?"

"I have received especial information from the French admiral, through Monsieur De La Fayette, which enables me to afford you instructions with no small degree of certainty."

"Cruise directly east and southeast from the Point here for a space of a hundred miles or more."

"This will place you in the track of the English store-ships, transports and cruisers passing to and from New York Harbor, which is still in the enemy's clutch."

"The superior sailing-qualities of the Spankaway—I doubt if she has her equal in any sort of wind—should enable you to make brilliant work among them."

"In addition, several days ago there was preparing for sea in New York Harbor the British armed barque Thunderbolt, under com-

mand of Captain Reginald Penrose, a younger brother of Lord Arthur."

"The supposition now is that she will be joined by Redbeard's Red Death, with Lord Arthur on board, after which the two vessels will doubtless combine in an attack hereabouts on our coast, chiefly to obtain possession of the young ladies, with perhaps the search for the buried treasure on Gardiner's Island as an after-issue."

"The junction of the two ships—Britisher and pirate—must not be permitted, if you can prevent it. Need I say more?"

"No, that will do. But stay: why do you not secure the buried treasure at once, now that the key to it is in your possession?"

"It will keep better in its original hiding-place, the secret of which is mine alone. My French creditors for the armament and provisioning of the Spankaway willingly abide my own time in payment therefor. My friend, all is in readiness. Adieu, and may God speed you!"

"Wait! My mother?"

"I will make the necessary explanations for you to the good dame."

"But you would not surely debar me of my leave-takings with Carletta, my betrothed?"

Marion slightly hesitated.

"It is not necessary. I have prepared her for this separation."

"Oh, I must and will clasp her in my arms once again!"

"Wait, then," with a strange smile. "But your partings must be brief, and in my presence."

"So be it."

Marion signaled one of her Indian pages, who came and went after receiving a few words of instruction from her.

In a few moments, Carletta and Aileen approached.

There were traces of tears on the latter's fair cheeks, for she had just parted from her lover, Paul Pennant, who could be seen dejectedly taking his way down the rocky path in the direction of the landing.

Carletta hung back bashfully for a moment, on her part, and then, with a sob, rushed into her lover's outstretched arms.

"My love, my life, my betrothed!" hoarsely exclaimed the young commander, striving with but poor success to master his emotion as he pressed her to his broad breast, raining his kisses on the lovely upturned face. "What misery is this for us! I had pictured myself bearing you away with me as my bride, and now we are to part! I must go forth, and alone!"

"Try to bear it, as I shall try, my darling Juan!" she sobbed in reply. "All is for the best—this strange and beautiful woman, who is already like a mother to my friendlessness, assures me of that. But oh, it is hard," weeping, "it is, indeed!"

These painful endearments continued, until Marion of the Mists, with one arm thrown about Aileen, advanced between them.

"Have done!" she cried, commandingly, and yet with an indulgent sweetness in her voice and manner. "My friend, duty calls you and will not be denied. A last embrace, and no more! I command!"

It was given, also a last kiss for Aileen, after which, as the young man shrunk back, baggared and pale, the Maid of Montauk stretched her hand toward him with a grand gesture that was both a benediction and a command.

Not trusting himself further, he turned and sped down the steep path, without casting a look behind.

Paul Pennant was in waiting at the landing with the last boatful for the schooner.

There was a series of hurried hand-grips, a parting cheer from the crowd of fishermen and smugglers left for the defense of the rock, and, with a splash of the falling oars, the yawl shot out through the lesser surf of the narrow cove.

Twenty minutes later, when the new letter-of-marque privateer Spankaway was scudding for blue water like a white-winged eagle of the deep, with the fresh wind on her port quarter, Jack for the first time ventured to look backward from his quarter-deck.

Marion was watching the departure from the house-roof, under the wide-floating starry banner, with an arm about either of her beautiful young protégées.

She waved a hand in farewell, so did Carletta and Aileen.

Both the young commander and Paul Pennant, who was at his side, responded in kind; a parting salute was fired from the stern-chaser, and, with a like starred-and-striped ensign streaming from her gaff, the preliminary cruise of the Spankaway was begun.

In spite of the seeming haste and mystery with which she had received her armament—a brass thirty-two-pounder at the stern, the same at the bow, with broadsides of two twenty-four-pounders each—she was found to be as perfectly fitted a privateer as had ever slipped cable; and so far as her speeding qualities were concerned, she was not long in proving herself a veritable greyhound of the waves, with a ready obedience

to her helm that was no less remarkable than the enormous press of canvas that she could carry on occasion.

"She is a marvel!" cried Tom Halyard, at the close of the day. "My word for it, as she is a racehorse on the run, she'll prove a lion in a fight."

"I don't believe the Red Death could beat her out, even before the wind," said Pennant, "and both she and the Black Death (happily now no more) were always conceded to be the swiftest square-riggers afloat."

Captain Jack nodded, but was silent. To tell the truth, he was entering upon the cruise with no less enthusiasm than theirs, but at the same time with a more or less uncomfortable load of mystery on his mind, in which Marion, Carletta, Aileen, Redbeard, Lord Penrose, Gascoyne, and perhaps Perez, too, seemed to be mixed up inextricably.

The schooner was tacking on a due easterly course, and now, at about sunset, the lookout reported a sail to the south.

All hands were instantly on the alert, and the course of the schooner being altered accordingly, before night set in the stranger was plainly discernible against the lingering brightness of the southern sky.

But the weather was thickening fast, and now occurred a repetition of the remarkable come-and-gone apparition of the morning.

The distant stranger, by a sudden shift of her position in the fading sunset light, showed a blood-red topsail against the sky, and then as suddenly disappeared behind the lowering fog, to be seen no more.

The pirate ship again!

"No matter!" muttered the young commander between his clinched teeth; "we'll accept it as a good omen for ourselves."

CHAPTER XVIII.

SHARP WORK.

AFTER a night of unrelieved blackness the sky cleared with such suddenness that the rising sun betrayed three vessels not more than three miles off the starboard bow.

They were keeping pretty close together, and proved to be a brig, with a general trimness of cut and rig that betrayed the fighter, and two larger, full-rigged ships, that she was evidently convoying.

This was Captain Bobstay's judgment, after a brief study of the strangers through the glass.

"Prizes ahead!" he shouted, his frame kindling with the fierce joy of battle. "Port your helm, there, till we see what the brig is made of; we can take care of those lumbering tubs at our leisure."

Instantly all was animation and expectance on board the privateer.

As she sheeted after the trio, the two ships took to their heels, so to speak, with everything crammed on, like a couple of colossal wild geese with a gyrfalcon in their wake, while their escort rounded slowly to so as to intercept the pursuit.

Then all doubt as to the character of the latter was dissipated by the Union Jack of Old England being fluttered from her gaff, her drums could be heard beating to quarters, while, at the same time, with a puff of smoke from her bow and a challenging boom, a first cannon-shot came ricocheting over the dancing waves, but falling a little short.

"An eighteen-pounder, if I'm any judge!" cried Captain Jack, in supreme contempt. "What! do they think to frighten us with such baby pills? Round her out, Mr. Halyard, and let us see what our gunner can do with this stern-chaser of ours."

This was accordingly done.

As the Spankaway rounded out, the Stars and Stripes suddenly streamed out like a meteor from her gaff, and the chaser, after a brief but careful aim on the part of Seth Longman—an old man-o'-war'sman who had been appointed gunner-in-chief—was let go.

It was the chaser's, no less than the privateer's, maiden shot in actual combat, and it was a trump.

Bill, bang! the shearing of a hundred wave-tips by a speeding iron sphere, and then the splinters flew in clouds from the brig's fore-chains.

A ringing cheer rose from the privateer's decks, and a corresponding confusion was perceived on the brig.

Then the latter let out with her broadside, which, however, also fell short, being nothing more than eighteen-pounders, after which she actually began to shorten sail, as a challenge to a fight at closer quarters.

But the Spankaway, being much the lighter vessel, was not the war-bird to be caught with this sort of chaff.

Keeping well off, now in the teeth of the wind, now before it, now taking it on one quarter, now on the other, and as delicately responsive to every turn of the wheel as an Amazonian nered to her fish-steed's tail, she all but completely circled her clumsier antagonist, just out of range of her eighteen-pounders, while peppering her with bow or stern chaser at discretion.

The privateersmen were fairly and deservedly in ecstasies over the performances of their gallant craft, which, much as had been anticipated, were little short of magical in the reality.

At last, venturing a little closer in, her double-shotted broadside of twenty-fours was delivered with such telling effect between wind and water that the brig, badly enough damaged before, listed perceptibly to port, and straightway began to careen.

The latter's port broadside, together with her bow-gun, was now practically useless, and, three minutes later, a raking shot from the Spankaway's terrible Long Tom completely wrecked her poop-deck and knocked her stern-gun endwise.

"Lay her in closer!" bawled the young commander. "Easy, there! and stand by for giving her another broadside, if needed."

As the Spankaway rounded in within less than a dozen cable-lengths, the decks of the listed brig were presented toward her at a sloping angle, while the British tars could be plainly seen working at the pumps and taking care of their wounded with the utmost difficulty in consequence.

A brilliantly-uniformed group of officers were busying themselves amid the ruins of the poop-deck with the prostrate forms of several of their number, killed or wounded.

"What ship are you?" roared Captain Jack through his trumpet.

"His Majesty's brig-of-war Gladiator," was the bellowed response. "What devil's craft are you?"

"The Yankee privateer Spankaway. Have you struck?"

"What! to a bloody Yankee pirate?" with an oath. "Not by a cursed sight!"

Jack turned with a significant nod to Tom Halyard, and the implied order was passed to Seth Longman, who was in readiness with the spare broadside.

Bang, crash, roar! it went with a simultaneous report; and then as the schooner rounded out like a wild duck, the young commander himself sprung to the fresh-shotted stern-chaser, letting it off at random through the powder-smoke.

As the latter drifted off on the gale, the hapless Gladiator's deck was seen to be riddled amidships, her mainmast gone by the board—hopelessly dismantled over her careened side, and her ship's company, both officers and men, panic-stricken or dazed.

"Brig-of-war Gladiator ahoy!" was again thundered over the dancing blue-water interval.

"Do you strike your flag?"

"Yes, we do," was the reluctant response, this time like the snarl of a wounded lion; "and be cursed to you!"

"Prisoner-of-war Gladiator ahoy!" once again, and with a remorseless ring in the challenge.

"Don't you see we've struck?" indignantly; for the Union Jack was in reality down, and the brig was otherwise in a mighty bad way.

"Tisn't enough just yet. Signal your convoys to take in sail!"

"Will see you in Tophet first!"

The vessels were now less than a cable's length apart, the Spankaway having again rounded to so as to bring her fresh broadside to bear.

Captain Jack waved his hand to his gunner, and the lighted fuses once more flashed over the touch-holes of the leveled war-dogs.

But before they could bark again—and with such biting and tearing effect as must now have been simply appalling—the British commander waved his hand submissively, and a lookout was seen shinning his way up the brig's ragged foremast-shrouds with a bunch of the requisite signal-flags under his arm.

The schooner was then run closer in, Captain Jack, with his two mates and several others, stepped upon the brig, and her formal surrender was made.

Her commander—a fine specimen of the British naval officer named Trowbridge—showed tears on his bronzed cheeks, and his lip trembled as he surrendered his sword, while his subordinate officers were no less affected.

"Sir," he said, with dignified grief, "I have sailed and fought this brig for five years in his Majesty's service, and it is bitter enough to have to strike at last to a Rebel privateer of less than half her tonnage and armament, as you may imagine. But what can anything do against such a water-devil as you seem to command? Here is my sword."

Captain Jack forthwith returned it to him with some words of fitting courtesy, and a temporary prize-crew was at once put in possession of sufficient numbers to assist in saving the brig from foundering.

Returning to his own deck, the young commander then gave the order to cast off, for the purpose of taking in the huge transports, both of which had by this time not only shortened sail but come about in obedience to the signals from their defeated escort, and were now nearly ten miles away.

"You aren't half a bad fellow," gruffly called out Captain Trowbridge, as Jack was politely lifting his hat to him while the Spankaway was sheering off, "and I don't mind giving you a

point. The bigger of the convoys is the Nautilus, crammed with powder for the king's troops in Carolina."

Jack thanked him with a parting wave of the hand, and then bore away for the store-ships.

How it ever chanced was never known, but half an hour later the powder-vessel was seen to blow up, and scarcely a fragment of her was ever seen again.

Her companion ship was peaceably taken possession of later on. She proved to be the Humber, six hundred tons, with a rich cargo of army stores, besides a money-chest containing two thousand pounds sterling in silver specie.

CHAPTER XIX.

A BESOM OF FIRE.

IN addition to the transport, the brig-of-war was also saved to her gallant captors; and both prizes were forthwith dispatched, under sufficient prize crews, for the French port of Brest, with all the prisoners on board, this being deemed the safer disposition of them by reason of the British cruisers that were now understood to be patrolling the American coast with more or less diligence from one end to the other.

The brig proved to be by far the most important capture at sea that had yet been effected in the patriot interest. She was a comparatively new vessel of sixteen guns. The prisoners were nine commissioned officers and one hundred and thirty men, including fifteen wounded. Three officers and twenty-four men had been slain. The Spankaway was without loss or scratch.

For three weeks thereafter, similarly exceptional luck attended the bold privateer uninterruptedly. She became a veritable besom of fire off the entire coast and well out to seaward from below Barnegat, New Jersey, clear up to Cape Cod. In this brief space a British armed cutter, two fighting transports, two others without armament, and five heavily-laden storeships, including a schooner, three brigs and a large barkentine, fell victims to her combined speed and prowess; and she was, moreover, thrice unsuccessfully chased by three large battle-ships, in each case easily effecting her escape by superior sailing and strategy, while making the iron sting of her redoubtable stern-chaser more or less severely felt.

In addition to this she had fallen in and communicated with two or three in-bound American or neutral vessels, by which, accordingly, the fame and terror of her destructive exploits were spread throughout the communities, to the inspiring jubilation of the patriot cause and the proportionate exasperation of the British.

At the close of this period the privateer fell in with a wrecked and dismantled schooner that was little more than a derelict, with a single man aboard, whose story was a strange one.

The vessel was the John Comyng, West Indian, of Boston, and this man was her carpenter and sole survivor. She had been taken and gutted the previous day by Redbeard, the pirate, an armed British bark being the Red Death's companion ship at the time of the seizure. All the Comyng's ship's company, with the single exception of this man, who had succeeded in hiding himself in the hold, had been ruthlessly butchered or made to walk the plank.

He had, however, been enabled to overhear a brief conversation between the two captains, pirate and Britisher, which was of the utmost importance to these his rescuers. After that the vessel had been fired and abandoned, but by good fortune the flames had died out after effecting but little material damage, and this single survivor, whose name was Humphreys, was left to bear witness to the tragedy.

From this overheard conversation it appeared that the pirate and Britisher were engaged in ruthlessly preying upon both American and French marine to the death, and that they were contemplating a combined descent upon the coast, the eavesdropper had not been able to learn exactly where. But the worthies had been joined in their talk toward the last by an English officer from on board the Red Death, the description of whose person made it certain that he could have been none other than Captain Lord Penrose, Jack's whilom prisoner of the defeated Salamander, and one of Marion of the Mists' secret foes.

The privateer made this discovery when about one hundred miles to the southeast of Montauk.

The destruction of the wreck was thereupon completed, Humphreys was enlisted with his rescuers, and then the Spankaway was headed home under all the sail she could carry to advantage.

"Marion's apprehensions were well enough founded!" exclaimed the young commander, while subsequently discussing this revelation with his two mates. "The spectacle is really being afforded to the world of a British naval captain striking hands with a blood-stained pirate chief, and there can be no doubt that their coast attack is to be made at Montauk, for obtaining possession of Carletta and Aileen, and the secret to the buried treasure on Gardiner's Island, if possible. (God grant that we shall be on hand in time to baffle their accursed intentions.)"

Paul Pennant's teeth were set, and he was very pale.

"We must be there in time!" he exclaimed. "What can be the secret of those powerful villains' deadly hatred of our dear mistress, the Maid of Montauk, and of their determination to carry off our sweethearts—yours and mine—Captain Jack?"

"It is Marion's secret, not ours," was the gloomy reply. "Solve any part of her mystery, and you will perhaps have the key to this one. What of black-browed Perez, her prisoner in the rock-cell? What of the vanished Gascoyne, the Adventurer? All parts of the same impenetrable mystery that clothes her like a garment!"

"Be that as it may!" cried bluff Tom Halyard, "our only course is to rush to the present rescue. And I fancy we shall have our hands full. The Red Death is the only craft that can approach us in sailing and maneuvering, and both Red Beard and this accursed Britisher should muster a strong fighting force between them."

"True," said Pennant. "My chief wonder is that they haven't made their attack upon the Point long before this."

"It is a proof, in my mind," observed Jack, "of the wholesome respect in which they must regard Marion herself and her defenders of the lone tower on the Point. However, that cannot be much longer in doubt."

But they met with unexpected head-winds, and when land was finally sighted, just at dawn of the second day following, it was evident that they were off the Long Island Coast, considerably to the west of the Point.

Then a large vessel was reported to be between them and the shore, and, as the cloudy morning slowly brightened, everything was made much clearer.

"It's the pirate's companion, the barque Thunderbolt!" exclaimed Jack, after a long look through the glass. "Yes; and boat-loads of men are already putting out from her. By Heaven! East Hampton yonder is the point of attack, and my mother's shore-side cottage is directly in the line of it."

"But where should the Red Death herself be, then?" demanded Halyard, who, together with Pennant, was also intently observing the stranger.

"Perhaps making a simultaneous attack upon our brethren of the Point," was the reply. "But they must suspect that Aileen and Carletta are still at my mother's house, or this attack would scarcely be made at all."

"Oh, trust the scoundrels for being wide enough awake!" cried Paul Pennant. "East Hampton is well worth the looting, and with Tory traitors enough to assist at the game."

Everything was put in fighting trim on the Spankaway, and she bore inshore gallantly, the wind being rather light from the southwest, and that much in her favor.

At last she opened the ball by letting fly with her bow-chaser, the shot falling short; while preparations were made for getting out the boats.

It was sufficiently evident that the Britisher was thoroughly alert to what was going on.

She rounded out a little, replying with a single shot as she did so, and by the movement showed yet another boat-load of men putting off from her for the shore.

Then a bright flame flashed up back of the sands, and, as the Spankaway continued to sweep inshore, all eyes and every telescope were on the watch.

"It's my mother's cottage in flames!" exclaimed Jack Bobstay, at last. "Paul," turning with compressed lips to his second mate, "you are right. The accursed Tories are getting in their share of the work."

And then he roared out the command:

"Boats out!"

CHAPTER XX.

HAND TO HAND.

"WHAT is your plan, Captain Jack?" asked Halyard, Pennant also looking up in curious expectancy for the answer.

"Plan!" cried the young commander. "There is but one thing to do. Whip out that accursed Britisher, save the village from being burnt, and then rush to Marion's assistance at the Point, where Redbeard is doubtless already at work. Halyard, you will command one boat. Pennant the other; I shall of necessity remain with the schooner until it is prudent to put off with yet another boat."

This plan was speedily carried out.

The barque had already put about, and it could be seen that her boats had effected a landing.

Then as the crews of the schooner's boats, crowded with victory-flushed rovers, got away with a cheer, the first shot from the Thunderbolt—a thirty-two pounder—danced athwart the privateer's bows, as she was rounding away.

"Brave pills this time, eh?" growled Captain Jack. "So be it."

Then the long Tom bellowed forth its response, and the fore-topmast of the enemy was felled with a rush, crippling her not a little at the base.

The exchanges then became fast and furious,

the Britisher behaving very nimbly considering her rig and inshore position, and the privateer fighting shy, with the intention of ultimately getting in between her and the strand, thus cutting off the retreat of her boats, while protecting the landing of her own.

This intention was presently facilitated by the over-confidence of the Britisher.

She suddenly shot out dead from the shore-line, while the Spankaway, whose boats' crews had by this time effected a landing about three miles further east, made a pretense of fouling on a sunken bar.

Then the barque, taking to the outside for sea-room, let fly with her entire broadside, which, however, fortunately flew too high.

Then the schooner was unexpectedly up and away between her and the shore, like a bird, while another lucky shot from her stern-chaser told in the barque's main-top, still further crippling the latter.

After that, there were numerous exchanges at long range, in which the Spankaway had the uninterrupted advantage, until finally a superbly lucky shot from the latter's bow-chaser brought down in hopeless wreckage the Britisher's entire mizzen-mast short off at the deck, thus practically wrecking her six miles off-shore, and giving her crew something else to think about besides handling her guns.

"Close in!" shouted Jack. "Shorter work, if we're to cut off her boats."

This was done, the witch of a schooner rounding in and out, with her favorite tactics, while letting fly with chasers or broadside, as the case might be, and at comparatively short range.

At last, with a ringing cheer from her deck, the barque's mainmast was also seen to go by the board, leaving her totally helpless for further maneuvering.

Then the Spankaway, with a parting shot from her stern-chaser that nipped off her enemy's bowsprit, bore inshore, and began shelling the boats that had been deserted by the tars engaged in the shore attack.

Finally, leaving the schooner under his next in command, with the necessary instructions, Captain Jack put off in her third boat, with sixteen picked men.

They had no sooner landed before the tars and marines, about sixty in number, were seen slowly retreating toward the beach before a small force of the patriot villagers, while the combined shore-party of the rovers under Halyard and Pennant were charging down upon them from the east.

Jack led the fresh attack from the shore-line, and ten minutes later the Britishers, finding themselves inclosed, made a disordered rush for their half-riddled boats.

Captain Jack's party met them with a well-directed fire and then closed in with a yell, while the villagers and privateersmen under the two mates also closed in.

The Britishers made a gallant fight for it against odds, but were speedily shot or cut to pieces.

In less than ten minutes, with the exception of a dozen or more wounded and prisoners, there wasn't a man of them left alive; while the loss on the part of the Americans was scarcely worth mentioning, and included none killed whatever.

"What of my mother?" exclaimed Jack, grasping the head man of the village home guard by the hand.

"Safe enough, Captain Jack," was the hearty reply. "Only two houses were burnt besides the dame's, and, best of all, every blasted Tory in the community is either a hunted man in the Shinnecock Hills or strung up by the neck."

"Back to the schooner!" roared the young commander. "Our work isn't half-done yet."

The order was jubilantly obeyed, the prisoners being left with the villagers.

When the victors were once more on board the Spankaway, the latter, still without a scratch, again bore out upon the Thunderbolt, which had by this time cleared away the wreckage from her sides, and was working her guns as best she might in her crippled condition.

But she was little more than helpless; shot after shot was poured into her decks and hulls, and then the privateer closed in upon her with a volley of canister that seemed to rake her from stem to stern.

"Boarders to the front!" shouted Jack. "Lay her aboard! Be ready to make fast! There we are!"

And then as the grapnels caught the rovers poured upon the bark's deck in three serried streams.

The bark's crew, however, apart from the loss of the shore-party, were still more numerous than their assailants, and might have made a staying fight but for the blowing up of their deck-magazine just at the moment of the boarding assault.

There was a terrific explosion, a sheet of flame, and when the air momentarily cleared, the decks were strewn with mutilated Britishers, while the poop deck was on fire in a dozen places.

Then, with a tremendous cheer, the adventurers swept her from stem to stern, the majority

of the dazed Britishers giving way before them in panic, and others perishing by shot or cutlass stroke.

"Hold, there!" shouted a deep voice, from amid the smoke of the quarter-deck, where the barque's officers, with a remnant of the crew, were making a last gallant stand. "Resistance is useless. We surrender!"

The murderous rush of the victors was accordingly stayed, and the surrender of the barque formally received, while the privateersmen assisted their defeated foes in extinguishing the flames and clearing the decks.

The commander of the barque was a tall, commanding-looking man, who bore a strong resemblance to Captain Lord Penrose.

"Sir," said he, with no little dignity, while yielding up his sword, "under ordinary circumstances I would blush to surrender to a Rebel privateer. But to one that has already and so briefly rendered herself a seemingly invincible terror of the seas it is different."

"Captain Reginald Penrose, I presume?" inquired the young commander, with a piercing glance, and giving no heed to the proffered sword.

The officer bowed in the affirmative.

"Sir, retain your sword at my request," said Jack, "though you would appear to better advantage in other than a pirate's company. Pray, give me the honor of your company in my cabin."

Captain Penrose blushed a little shame-facedly, and Jack, after giving some general orders, forthwith conducted him to the cabin-saloon of the Spankaway, where refreshments were served them.

"You can do as you please, sir, about answering certain questions I desire to put to you," said Jack, after he had broken bread and touched glasses with his prisoner. "But I assure you they will be inspired by private, and not by public considerations."

"Oh, I shan't be close-mouthed in that case, Captain Bobstay!" exclaimed the other, with an uncomfortable movement. "Curse it all! I have felt a half-contempt for myself ever since I consented to cruise in company with that blasted pirate, at my brother, Lord Penrose's, suggestion. But then there was authority behind his entreaty, for that matter."

"Ah! you mean to confess, then, that your league with a corsair, like Captain Redbeard of the Red Death, is formally sanctioned, if not positively ordered, by your naval superiors?"

"Sir, I shall say nothing more on that point," replied the other, more collectedly. "You have my personal acknowledgment, with which I trust you will rest contented."

"All right! Is Captain Lord Penrose, formerly my prisoner, now with Redbeard?"

"Yes."

"And I presume they are even now making an attack upon the Round House at the Point?"

"Such was the intention."

"Sir, there is no plunder there to tempt such an attack. It is made to obtain the possession of two innocent young ladies."

"It is true. In fact, I thought to surprise those young ladies by my attack upon this shore. But I assure you, sir, no disrespect would have come to the young ladies had they become my captives."

"I will not insult you by disbelieving that, sir."

"Sir, I thank you."

"Have you any idea of Lord Penrose's motive in obtaining possession of these young ladies?"

"He has vaguely given me to understand that they may be connected with him by ties of blood. More than this I do not know. My brother is much my elder, and much of his private affairs in the past have been mysterious. As for the pirate skipper, I know nothing of his motives, and despise him, personally."

After conversing at much greater length, they went on deck, where a surprise awaited the Britisher.

CHAPTER XXI.

AT MONTAUK.

AN extraordinary change had come over the situation during the brief hour that had been passed by the two commanders below.

The Spankaway was standing well out to sea. The Thunderbolt was drifting inshore, wrapped in flames. A last boat, laden with Yankee sailors and wounded British tars, was putting off from her for the privateer.

"What!" exclaimed Penrose, in unreflecting indignation; "is it thus that you dispose of such a gallant prize?"

The Spankaway's commander looked inquiringly at his first mate, who had instantly approached.

"There was no help for it, Captain Jack," said Halyard. "You had given orders that you were not to be disturbed. So, after consulting with Pennant, I determined to act on my own responsibility."

"How was it?" demanded Jack.

"Here it is in a nutshell: We had hardly got ready to cast off from the barque before we discovered that the flames had run in between her decks, and were beyond control. The greater

part of the wounded and prisoners were got off to shore, while here around you are the commissioned officers, awaiting your pleasure. We also succeeded in saving some fixed ammunition, but nothing more."

"It is our loss, no less than your Government's, you see," said Captain Bobstay, turning to his chief prisoner. "A fine prize is gone."

"I see that, sir," was the grave response.

Here the Thunderbolt's between-decks magazine blew up with a tremendous explosion, leaving the flaming mass a blazing crater floating on the waves.

Captain Penrose and his subordinate officers, seven in number, were at once placed under parole, and quarters assigned to them; after which the privateer was headed for the Point, not quite thirty miles away.

The booming of heavy guns was presently heard, and at last, when the Round House was fairly in sight, a new situation, only a little less fortunate for the Spankaway's adventurers than the last one, to all appearances, presented itself.

The Red Death was stuck fast on a sand-bar, about four miles off-shore, whence she was blazing away with her only available broadside at the Tower, and at the same time covering ashore attack on the part of her boats, which were just about effecting a landing directly under the Head.

But no damage had thus far been effected; the Stars and Stripes were still streaming defiantly from the lofty roof; and the whilom smugglers were keeping a brisk and apparently somewhat effective musketry fire upon the desperadoes forming in line on the beach.

The young captain's eyes glistened triumphantly.

"Nothing could be better!" he exclaimed. "Get two boats, Halyard. Pennant shall command one, I the other; and, while we are rushing to Marion's aid, you should be able to scud around the stuck pirate at leisure, and pepper her without mercy. No time must be lost, however, as this rising tide should float her off in less than an hour."

This plan was forthwith carried out, and bravely enough at the outset.

Jack and Paul effected a landing a mile to the west of the smugglers' cave, at which the shore fight was being waged.

As they did so, the Spankaway could already be seen a mile outside the Red Death, and raking the latter unmercifully, with but little damage to herself. Then, as the shore-party marched on up the beach, one seemed to be circling around her bulky prey while firing with yet greater effect.

But the shore-attack of the pirates numbered more than one hundred strong, and by the time the privateer's shore reinforcement of twenty-eight men were enabled to take a hand, the former were already masters of the cavern-entrance, and comparatively shielded from the rock above, whither the smugglers had slowly been driven to take up their stand, by the abruptness of its rise, though a score or more of the bravos were already stretched wounded or lifeless along the narrow sandy strip.

Cutlass in hand, Jack Bobstay was at the head of the flanking attack, his teeth set, his eyes flashing with the fierce light of hand-to-hand battle, and Paul Pennant was at his side.

"Forward!" he shouted; "and spare not, as you will not be spared."

Then the little column, though hardly breathed from their forced march of a mile, charged the pirates at the cave-mouth with shot and shell.

A dozen more of the latter went down under the first charge, but a moment later the rovers were hemmed in by superior numbers, though fighting like demons.

For a breathless space it looked as if the privateersmen were destined to be wiped out to a man, and there was Captain Redbeard in person, his right arm bared to the shoulder, his long sword dripping with blood to the hilt, cheering his sea-wolves to the top of their ferocious bent.

"Blood for blood!" he roared, making straight for Jack through the press. "Kill, kill, kill! Jack, my bantam, your comb needs cutting."

"Less than your own throat, tiger of the seas!" was the gallant response. "Look to yourself."

Then they clashed together, and simultaneously Paul Pennant found himself similarly engaged with Lord Penrose, who was figuring hardly less conspicuously than the pirate chief himself in the conflict.

"Courage!" cried a clear and resolute but musical voice from not far away. "Hold but your own, Jack! Well struck, Pennant! Here we are once more!"

And then Marion herself—cutlass in one hand, pistol in the other, her hair streaming in the wind, her white-robed lissom figure belted with bristling pistols—was seen leading a rally on the part of her fighters, Indians and others, down the rocky path.

"Take that woman alive!" hoarsely shouted Redbeard, staggering his young antagonist back with a fierce breast-blow from his sword-hilt. "The sorceress! her capture alone is worth more to us—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the Maid of Montauk,

a bullet from her pistol at that instant furrowing his cheek. "Villain, it is Marion's turn now! Gascoyne and vengeance!"

A surge of the struggle had momentarily relieved the pirate chief of his immediate antagonist.

With a hoarse oath, he sprung upon his beautiful woman-foe, twirling the cutlass out of her hand at a deft, powerful stroke, and then for a fleeting instant's space her form, in spite of the pomard which she drew with the rapidity of thought, was crushingly encircled by his gigantic arm.

An instant only, and then he was in the grip of Pambo, the colossal black, and over and over they rolled in a fierce wild-beast grappling-clutch upon the sand.

But Marion had just released herself, panting, and Jack found himself breast to breast with L'Elonais, the whilom second mate of the Black Death, when a feminine scream was heard, and Perez was perceived bursting out of the cavern entrance, with both Carletta and Aileen struggling in his powerful grasp.

The captive desperado had either been liberated by some of the pirates penetrating through the cave and up to his prison cell, or in some way effected his own release at the critical moment; after which it would have been but the work of a few uninterrupted moments for him to mount into the tower, and seize upon the hapless girls, both of whom, for all their frantic strugglings, were but helpless as against his strength, which was something unusual.

"Here you are, Redbeard!" shouted the ruffian. "Here are the pretty cage-birds, and thus do I condone my former wrong to you. But where the deuce are you? And why—"

At that instant, Marion, taking her chances of missing the young women, flashed a fresh pistol from her girdle and fired.

Still retaining his grip on his fair prizes, Perez reeled back, with the bullet in his neck.

At this juncture Jack had succeeded in disabling his new antagonist by a great cutlass-gash on the sword-arm, and he sprang headlong upon the reeling pirate.

Carletta's outstretched hand was already in his grasp when a dastard blow from behind fell upon him, and he knew no more.

CHAPTER XXII. GONE!

WHEN Jack Bobstay recovered his senses, one of Marion's Indian maidens was lavishing his head with a cooling lotion and the Maid of Montauk herself was holding one of his hands, while sympathetically gazing into his face.

They were on a sunny platform of rock between the foot of the tower and the beetling edge of the steep.

Seeing that her charge was at last coming to, Marion turned her eyes to seaward, with a stony, hopeless look.

Jack slowly sat up, felt of his head with both hands, and then little by little took in the changed situation of affairs as indicated by his surroundings.

The fight had been over for an hour, the pirates having finally been driven off.

On the beach before the cavern-mouth the surviving smugglers and privateersmen of the late desperate struggle were burying the enemy's dead and their own in shallow graves scooped out of the beaten sands.

Prisoners or seriously wounded men there were none, the fight having been literally to the death on either side.

Out in the offing rode the Spankaway, her maintopmast in splinters and wounds in her port bow, which were rapidly being repaired.

All but hull-down in the east was the corsair ship, her topsails dusky or vividly red, as showing in their own shadow or the flash of the noonday sunshine, the lowering clouds of the forenoon having disappeared.

"Carletta—Aileen!" exclaimed the young commander, after a troubled pause. "Where are they?"

"Gone!"

"What—both?"

"Gone!"

It was Marion of the Mist that answered, each time hopelessly, and without turning her stony gaze from the receding ship.

Then she signed the attendant to go, and briefly recounted the final details of the struggle.

Briefly, it was this: A reinforcement of pirates had reached the shore at the critical moment. By this means they had been enabled to hold back the smugglers and privateersmen long enough to get off with their fair captives. The pirates had left twenty-seven of their dead on the sands. Nineteen had been slain on the part of their opponents. Neither Captain Redbeard, Lord Penrose nor Perez were among the killed though the last named had been severely wounded, and the first named slightly so. The Red Death had floated off the bar with the tide a little later on, and then a couple of lucky shots from her guns had knocked off the Spankaway's topmast, besides temporarily disabling the latter's wheel, and the corsair had been content to put off to sea, herself in a considerably battered condition.

The young commander sprung to his feet, reeled a little, with a shooting pain from the confusion on the back of his head, but, after steadying himself against a support, was apparently as good as new.

"But what means this despair, Marion?" he cried. "I am astonished at it in you."

She shook her head sadly. "Are they not gone—the bright, the beautiful ones?" she said, hopelessly. "Have not my bitterest enemies triumphed in that? Besides—"

"The disaster is not without remedy. But what else were you going to say?"

"Oh, I scarcely know!" She put her white hand to her head. "But somehow I had hoped, though perhaps against hope—" She hesitated again.

"What had you hoped, Marion?"

"That—that Gascoyne might be among them—that he might be thus coming back to me, perhaps in disguise."

"What! among the pirates?"

"Yes." And her beautiful head was bowed upon her breast.

"But this is madness! To be here at all, the Red Death must have sailed north directly after rescuing her confederates of the sinking Black Death; or, at least, there would have been no time for her to have visited San Christophe first, where Gascoyne could alone have joined them."

"Yes, yes, I know. And yet how I had hoped!"

"Marion!" He seized her hand. "Do not break down thus, or you will unman me. Be the heroine that you have always been—that you were but an hour ago in that desperate fight. Do try to take heart!"

"My friend, I will essay to do so!" She looked up at him with her mournful, tearless eyes. "But alas! are the young girls not torn from us hopelessly?"

"Not yet! The pirates cannot be homeward-bound for good, but must return. This is nothing but an additional ruse. Have you forgotten their second object—the buried treasure?"

She started, hope again struggling into her marble face.

"True, I had forgotten that," she exclaimed. "Yes; they will not give over that chance, or will not be likely to!"

"Not by a long shot! and we may even look for them to-night, which would give us yet another chance for the recovery of the girls. You have still got the key—the mysterious parchment?"

She hastily thrust her hand into the bosom of her gown, and then stared wildly.

"Gone! gone!" she exclaimed, almost as desolately as in the first instance.

"What! you are sure!" cried the young man, breathlessly. "It cannot be. Look again!"

She once again searched for it, but in vain.

"Ah, that villain, Redbeard! no less cunning than desperate!"

"What do you mean?"

"He must have felt it crinkling in my bosom, and then deprived me of it during the brief instant he had me in his hideous clutch."

"Would there have been time?"

"For him, yes—time for almost anything! He is as much of a fox as of a wolf."

"Wait! a happy thought strikes me. You once said he would be unable to decipher the parchment, even if it were in his possession."

"True; I had forgotten that. Though, with Lord Penrose's help, he might succeed in doing so. But now I think of it, there is still another hope for us."

"What is it?"

"Directly after my first interview with you, I fortunately translated the guiding directions contained in the parchment. Wait here."

She ran into the tower, and presently returned, fluttering a piece of writing.

"It is safe!" she exclaimed. "Look you, my son. There were three secret treasure plants made by the pirate Kidd on Gardiner's Island. One of these was recovered, as is well known, by the Governor of Massachusetts in 1690. These directions, as translated by me, refer to the two remaining plants."

"Why, this is even better than if the original key had remained in our possession!" cried Jack, joyfully. "Do you not see that it will be an additional bait for Redbeard's immediate return? We can even hope that he will succeed in deciphering it, which would yet further clinch the temptation."

"Yes, I see that now. My son, you have been brighter and less weak in this than I."

"No, no; but then let us make our preparations forthwith against the chance of the pirate's visit to Gardiner's Island this very night. I shall put off at once, to set to getting the Spankaway in order. In the mean time, you must muster every Indian on the Point, and send word to both Sag Harbor and East Hampton for such volunteers as can be raised. We should be in readiness on the Island by sunset, after which a general plan for an ambushade can be arranged."

Marion had by this time entirely recovered from her despondency.

She accompanied Jack to the Spankaway's boats, and then, after he had put off for the

schooner, hurried away to set her part of the rough programme on foot.

Pambo was in the boat that carried the young commander back to the privateer.

His head was bandaged, and he looked up from his oar with a pleased grin.

"Big fight, Marse Jack!" he said.

"I should say so, old fellow!" cried Jack, giving him a hand-grip. "And you bore your part finely, too."

"Golly, Marse Jack! done you reely t'ink so?"

"I do indeed, Pambo."

"Golly, but I might hab done better ef I'd only had some sort ob a weepen de time when I done tackled Bully Redbeard. But you see, Marse Jack, dere wa'n't much time fur considerin' dem t'ings, and Missy Marion she war already in him grab."

"That is true."

"An' you done reely t'ink I gub him [a purty tight tussle, Marse Jack?"

"Of course I do."

"Den you kin do me a fabor in return, Marse Jack."

"Name it, my man."

"Don't leabe me behin' on de nex' cruise ob de Spankaway."

"Indeed I shall not, old fellow; and it was altogether an oversight that you were left behind in the first instance. However, it was perhaps as well as it was, or you might not have been on hand for that defense of Marion of the Mists at the critical moment to-day. But you can regard yourself booked for to-day; and there will be room for more like you."

At this juncture they reached the schooner's side.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE FIGHT FOR THE BURIED TREASURE.

The repairs on board the Spankaway were prosecuted with such dispatch that they were completed by sunset.

Then, as she was under sail, and rounding the Point for the treasure island, twenty miles away to the northwest, Jack, whose excitement had enabled him to keep on his feet thus far, found the pain of his contusion returning with such force as to compel him to take a rest.

He improved the period of enforced idleness, however, by conferring with his mates in the cabin saloon, and unfolding the new plan of action for their benefit.

"It's a good one!" exclaimed Paul Pennant, with his accustomed impulsiveness. "Anything, in fact, is good that shall give us another chance at those bloodthirsty bounds. By Heaven! the thought of Aliene being in Redbeard's power is simply maddening."

"Don't forget," said Jack, "that I've as good cause for exasperation as yourself. But, for all that, we must consider the matter coolly."

"That is the talk," interposed Halyard, who had a stronger vein of caution in his composition than either of the others. "Yes, the plan is a good one if— Well, there are several ifs in the affair, as you'll doubtless both allow."

"Granted," said Jack. "But suppose you formulate those that occur to you, individually?"

"All right, my hearty! In the first place, then, the plan is good if the pirates really return for the treasure."

"Of course."

"And also if we succeed in drawing them into an ambushade, both by water and by land."

"Good enough. Any more?"

"Not that I can think of just now."

"Well, we'll have to wait to see what sort of a land force Marion shall be able to muster on the island before we can decide. And as for hiding the privateer out of sight, there is Rock Cove, indenting the main shore just across from the island's southern point."

"Excellent!" exclaimed Halyard. "Just the spot for our concealment!"

An hour later they arrived off the island, when a considerable body of men was seen to be gathered on its shore, whereupon the privateer was brought to an anchor, while Jack and his two subordinates put off to investigate.

They were greeted by Marion herself, who stood on the sands with about thirty of her armed followers around her, while several boats filled with men were in sight coming up from the direction of Sag Harbor.

"There are forty more men promised us," she explained, "and these must be the party that are now in sight. I have a lookout yonder," she indicated a rather lofty and partly wooded rise of ground back of the beach. "It will be a clear night, and as soon as he shall signal a ship coming into the bay it will be time enough to form our ambushade."

Jack pointed to the privateer, and then to the deep-sheltered niche in the opposite shore known as Rock Cove, explaining to her what had been agreed on by his mates and himself.

"There could be no better secret anchorage than that," assented the Maid of Montauk. "But what is your further plan for the schooner's operations?"

"To cut out the pirate's boats as soon as the first shot signals that their men shall have been ambuscaded," was the prompt reply, "and then

lay the Red Death aboard with fire and steel forthwith."

"But will that be feasible?"

"What is to hinder? If the pirates come at all they will expect some sort of anticipation of their scheme, and, therefore, will be likely to land at least half their fighting force, or say sixty men, to make a sure thing of the treasure. That will leave the privateer's entire force, which I have now increased to a full complement of one hundred men, with which to lay the ship aboard."

"True."

"Another thing. The soundings are so deep at this side of the island that the pirate will be enabled to anchor within less than half a mile of the shore, and within two miles of Rock Cove yonder. We shall wait till she is anchored and her shore detachment well engaged. Then, if this west wind only holds, we can slip the Spankaway in between her and the shore with the speed and silence of a phantom, and we shall be aboard of her almost before she knows it."

"That is well. If all goes as well as we hope for, without further outside help, this plan should act to a charm."

"Outside help?"

"Yes."

"You perhaps mean on the part of the British?"

"Precisely."

"But what is left for them, since their comrade-ship, the Thunderbolt, is no more?"

"Still, as they obtained that sort of assistance once, they may do so again. Don't let us forget that Lord Penrose is still at Redbeard's elbow, and there is, moreover, no telling what British craft they may have had an opportunity of communicating with since their sailing away from this morning's fight."

"I had not thought of that. But still," and Jack brightened up, "we must not borrow trouble, but hope for the best."

"That is the music!" cried Paul Pennant. "Let us but once lay the accursed craft aboard with superior, or even equal numbers, and I ask for nothing better on my part."

"The event must determine us," said the more prudent Halyard. "In the mean time, to be prepared for anything is our safest outlook."

Here the reinforcements for the land force effected a landing, and, after all the men had been somewhat organized, Marion of the Mists signed the young commander and his two officers to accompany her apart.

"Follow me," she said.

Leading them back between the two hills that faced the bay, she pointed to a lonely spot of the broken ground beyond, where a rough quadrangle of an acre or more was marked off by six or seven huge pine-trees, which towered above the other trees of the locality, for the most part oaks of a scrubby growth.

"It is within that natural inclosure that the buried treasures lie," observed Marion. "Therefore, supposing Redbeard to have mastered, even in part, the cabalistic writing of the parchment, it is straight to this general spot that he will direct his followers instantly upon their landing. The hills back yonder on either side will serve the purpose of our ambushade."

"Simple enough, Marion," said the commander of the Spankaway, while his companions nodded their assent. "But shall not you take advantage of your forehanded knowledge, and begin to unearth the treasures at once?"

"By no means."

"Why not, of your courtesy?"

"In the first place, such a course would argue a fear that the pirates may possibly overcome our opposition to their object, which I do not entertain for an instant."

"Ah, true."

"And, in the next place, the treasures are in any event safer where they now lie concealed, inasmuch as this is no time to betray my secret with even our friends at hand in such mass, while I do not believe it possible that the pirates will be able to more than decipher the preliminary key-words, even under the most favorable circumstances."

These conclusions were satisfactory enough, and they forthwith retraced their steps.

At this juncture there came the signal from the lookout on the hill to the effect that a ship was descried heading for the bay.

Night had by this time closed in, but with a brilliant moon and any quantity of stars.

Instantly the news spread, and all was guarded animation among the volunteers.

Half an hour later the ship was generally visible, and there could be no further doubt as to her being the pirate.

Marion, with Paul Pennant's assistance, at once set about forming their contemplated ambushade, while Captain Bobstay and Halyard hastened to rejoin the privateer, which forthwith hoisted anchor and slipped away into the concealment of Rock Cove.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE TUG OF WAR.

SLOWLY and silently the Red Death entered the wide opening of the outer bay, and came to

an anchor less than half a mile off the island beach.

Then it was evident that they were pretty certain of the coast being clear for their intended operations, for as the boats began to put off from the ship, crammed with armed men, no great amount of secrecy was observed.

However, that any chance of a surprise was being guarded against, was also soon apparent.

The boats, four in number, after discharging their living freight, returned for yet more, until finally at least sixty or seventy cut-throats could be seen marshaled upon the beach.

The moonlight was, moreover, so bright that the pirate chief's towering form could be plainly distinguished among the rest, together with another commanding figure which evidently belonged to Lord Penrose.

"All ready and steady!" Redbeard's voice was presently heard to call out by the ambassadors. "We have probably got the golden find all to ourselves. Forward, march!"

He headed the column of cut-throats, and, with some slight degree of organized form, they moved straight up between the hills, showing that at least the general directions of the parchment had been mastered; inasmuch as an easier random exploration would have led them round the base of either.

The last of the straggling column had but fairly disappeared amid the shadows when there was a signal-shot.

A murderous volley instantly followed, succeeded by straggling shots, and the glen was forthwith filled with the noises of a deadly struggle in progress.

The Spankaway had already slipped her cable, and, catching the west wind on her port quarter at the opportune moment, began to glide rapidly and noiselessly out of the cove into the outer bay.

Five minutes later, her bow-chaser poured its iron compliments into the hull of the astounded pirate, and this was followed by her broadside at such close quarters that two of the Red Death's own broadside-guns were plainly seen to be dismounted on the spot.

In fact, the movement was executed so fortunately that the privateer was fairly between the island beach and her anchored enemy almost before the latter appeared to thoroughly realize the situation, and the broadside was repeated with no less deadliness than the first, while at last a storm of yells and curses burst from the pirate's decks.

These were but as an echo of the pandemonium that was now prevailing between the adjacent hills.

"Lay her aboard!" shouted the young commander, at the critical moment, with the enemy less than half a cable's length. "Ready there with the grappling-irons! Steady all!"

Then a random flurry of the wind assisted, and the Spankaway's sharp nose (which had been planked up and strengthened in view of just such an emergency) struck the ship a slanting blow, ram-fashion, on the port bow with a force that caused her to quiver and reel from truck to keel, at the same time driving a bowsprit hard over her fore-reach, which helped the grappling process.

Then there was a last broadside, double-shot, which tore through the pirate's side, without a single cannon-shot in return as yet, after which the two vessels swung together with a grinding crash and were grappled.

"Boarders ahoy!" yelled Jack. "Give 'em their own medicine—no quarter!"

And he headed the rush of boarders from aft, while Halyard led a like attack from forward.

But the pirates had by this time thoroughly recovered from their surprise, and, though obviously outnumbered, were on hand with their accustomed ferocity to contest every inch of the attempt, with Dirkman, the fierce Welsh mate, in command.

"Blood for blood!" he roared, as the hand-to-hand struggle culminated at the bulwark's edge.

"Remember, we're fighting with ropes about our necks! Blood for blood!"

"You have it!" was Jack Bobstay's grim response, and he shot him down in his tracks. "Upon them, men! This floating horror of the seas is at last at our mercy."

Then the outnumbered desperadoes were pressed back, though contesting every inch, and the surge of the conflict was over the paired gunwales and upon the Red Death's deck.

At this exciting juncture a brawny grip was suddenly placed upon Jack's arm, and Pambo's voice was in his ear.

"Look away to de norf, Marse Jack!" whispered the negro. "We-uns am done. But whatebber happens, doan't you furgit dat Pambo am't dead, but on de watch ober dem lubly young gals."

With that he darted forward, hewing his way, battle-ax in hand, through the line of slowly-retreating pirates in front, and was seen no more.

At the same instant Lord Penrose's vessel sufficiently unwelcome apparition in the direction indicated.

It was that of a British armed schooner.

swooping down from just inside of Plum Island to the northeast.

rion's apprehensions had not been misplaced. The opportunity had been seized, and the British naval authorities were still true to their blood-stained corsair ally in their merciless intentions against the struggling patriot cause.

Jack laid his hand upon Seth Longman, the Spankaway's chief gunner, drew him back out of the press, and pointed out the new danger.

"Take out a couple of men, and get to work with the bow-gun instantly," he ordered, in a low voice. "There is a bare chance of hulling her at the water-line before she can interfere, and it is our only one."

Then he hurriedly joined once more into the hand-to-hand fight, in the hope of carrying the pirate in time, while Longman sprang back upon the privateer, with two sailors to keep him company, in obedience to the order.

But it was too late.

The Britisher was a fast sailer, and, having slipped out from the shelter of Plum Island without being noticed, was now less than a mile away, and her deck was, moreover, black with jack-tars.

Flash! went the privateer's bow-chaser. But the shot flew harmlessly, and instantly there was a responsive flash and report from the cutter's bow, the cannon-ball knocking some splinters out of her opponent's caboose, and killing one of Longman's assistants on the spot.

To make matters worse, the cutter was coming down with a perfect rush, and, being seen by many of the privateersmen in the thick of the fight for the possession of the pirate's deck, caused them to waver or lose heart, with the victory immediately before them already within their clutch.

The outnumbered pirates were correspondingly inspired, and, gathering their flagging energies for a final rally, they recovered their lost ground with a terrific rush, transferring the struggle once more to the locked bulwarks.

Jack stormed from point to point, trying to recover the checked vantage, but in vain.

Though nearly one-half the pirates had been slain, the survivors were fighting like rejuvenated demons; a large portion of the privateersmen were panic-stricken or irresolute, and at last, while men were falling everywhere around him, Tom Halyard himself staggered back, his left arm dropping useless to his side from a ghastly cutlass-gash.

And at this supreme moment, when the failing fight might still have been retrieved, if the *status quo* could have been maintained, the Britisher grappled the devoted privateer on the unprotected side, and her tars, to the number of fifty or more, poured themselves over the barriers with a ringing English cheer.

"Jack!"

"Juan, my darling!"

The two cries, in different girlish voices, rung out above the din of the combat almost simultaneously.

The young commander caught but a fading glimpse of Carletta and Aileen at the head of the pirate's companionway, as they were being dragged back and down from behind by a brawny black arm thrown around each, and then the peril of his vessel's predicament dissipated every other thought.

But now that the fight was transferred to the Spankaway's deck, such of the privateersmen as had wavered before a magnified or imaginary danger were speedily themselves again.

Halyard could still keep his feet, and a comparatively small portion of the Americans under his and Longman's lead sufficed to keep the pirates, now thinned out to no more than a handful, at bay, while the rest under Jack could devote themselves unreservedly to the Britishers, whom they not only outnumbered, but were speedily enabled to beat back.

But by this time, perceiving that his men were completely exhausted, while the Britishers were yet fresh, Captain Jack reluctantly gave the order to cast off at both sides, and, taking advantage of the freshening wind, the Spankaway shot out from between her enemies.

CHAPTER XXIV.

AFTER THE FIGHT.

BOTH pirate and Britisher had had enough of it, and no attempt was made on the part of either to hinder the Spankaway's honorable withdrawal out of the unequal contest.

Captain Jack was quick to seize a fresh opening that was afforded him by this hung state of affairs, as it might be called.

The shore ambuscade had by this time been so far successful that the treasure-seeking pirates were already driven to their boats, still hotly pressed by the Americans, and after leaving more than half their number dead in the fatal pass between the hills.

Still smarting under the unexpected turn that had snatched the capture of the Red Death out of his hands, the Spankaway's commander did not make a deliberate choice, as he should have done, between turning his attention once more to the defeated corsairs, now putting off in their

boats to rejoin their ship, and renewing his attack upon the Britishers.

Again getting his crew thoroughly in hand, he had no sooner cleared well away from his perilous position than the necessary order was given, and a moment later his redoubtable Long Tom opened upon the cutter at a range of less than two cable-lengths, and with terrible effect in consequence.

The Britisher, doubtless deeming the privateer only too glad to get off scot-free, was entirely unprepared.

Her entire stern-post was demolished by the shot, thus leaving her rudder practically useless, and, the Long Tom being served with no less rapidity than precision, the shot was repeated half a dozen times in swift succession that she was little more than a wreck, with both top-masts gone, her poop dismantled, her own guns useless by reason of her crippled condition, and her deck strewn with slain and wounded tars.

Then, as her remorseless enemy rounded to for the purpose of giving her a broadside at yet closer quarters that might prove a finisher, a yell of execration went up from her ship's company.

The Red Death, having been rejoined by such of her detachment as had survived the ambuscade of the hill-pass, was sheeting out for the open sea, leaving her crippled ally to her fate.

Here the threatened broadside from the privateer was poured into the unfortunate cutter, the latter's magazine blew up with a tremendous report, shattering her into thousands of blazing fragments, and hurling every man-jack of her gallant but misguided crew into Kingdom Come.

"Brave men, deserving a better fate!" commented Captain Jack, as the Spankaway herself quivered under the concussion of the disaster. "But she follows the fate of the Thunderbolt, and if England can afford to ally her naval forces with pirates for the destruction of a brave people simply fighting for the divine right of independence and self-government, the consequences be on her own head!"

He would then have willingly followed in chase of the pirate, but that the latter was by this time fully three miles out to sea and making superb speed, being square-rigged and with her upper works still practically intact, before the stiffening westerly gale.

Moreover, at this juncture a watch-fire twinkled up from among the victors on the island beach, and he perceived Marion herself signaling him to remain.

He at once put off from the schooner and joined her.

The ambuscade had been a complete success, the defeated pirates having left thirty-four of their number dead in the pass, while there had been only a number of wounds, not one of them serious, on the patriot side.

"You have done nobly!" was Marion's comment, when she had listened to Jack's brief report on the part of the privateer's performance. "But you must spend the remainder of the night in refitting at every point. We should be on the accursed pirate's track by daylight."

"We?" repeated the young man, looking at her in unfeigned surprise.

"Certainly," was her calm reply.

"What! you will accompany us on the next cruise?"

"I shall."

And then, as he still looked astonished, she regarded him with her strange, mystical smile.

"I am, perhaps, a better sailor than you imagine, my son," she said, quietly.

"I don't doubt that, Marion."

"Then why should you be taken aback at my determination to accompany you?"

"Merely because of the unexpectedness of the proposition, dear friend. Far from opposing it, I am sure that your presence on board ship will exert a constant inspiring effect on the entire crew. But—"

"But what?"

"Well, you've always been about the rocky head over yonder, and you seem to have become a part of it, or rather the rock a part of you."

"You mean that I have always been about the rock since you can remember?"

"Yes, of course."

"My son, you are not quite a Methuselah yet. It is time the ancient tower on the rock and I should separate, at least for a period. There are those whom I can trust to look after the tower in my absence. In the mean time, I should not be able to remain there in the suspenseful thought of those sweet girls being in those villains' power. Till we meet again, then, my young friend. I shall now hasten back to the Point to complete my preparations. Yet stay!" as he was turning to go.

"What is it, Marion?"

"Pambo, the faithful negro?"

"Yes?"

"You are sure as to his having vanished below on the pirate ship?"

"Perfectly sure."

"Then he must have remained secreted in the ship?"

"Assuredly! It was undoubtedly his black

arms that I noticed draw both Carletta and Aileen back into the companionway at the glimpse I had of them."

"But will he be able to keep his secret as a stowaway?"

"More than likely, considering his knowledge of the pirates' ways and their present thinned ranks. Besides, we must not forget his cheering words of assurance at parting with me."

"Ah! heaven preserve the faithful Pambo, in any event. That is all, then, my son. You shall find me in readiness."

"Another moment, on my part, Marion."

"What is it, my friend?"

"My mother! There will not be time, then, for me to pay her a farewell visit?"

"No; but there are East Hampton men hereabouts who can assure you that she is well and with the kindest of friends for the approaching winter."

"That must suffice me, then."

At daybreak of the following morning the Spankaway, thoroughly recruited and provisioned afresh, once more rounded the Point, and having taken the Maid of Montauk, together with certain of her effects on board, was headed for fresh adventure o'er the limitless expanse of sea to the south.

Long after the hour of final sailing the strange woman remained seated on the poop-deck, in the thoughtful attitude in which she had first sunk, after bidding adieu to those of her followers who were left behind, with her pensive eyes fixed upon the rapidly-receding shore, and particularly upon the bright banner on the tower that still fluttered afar its starry and meteor folds as jubilantly as on the day when it had first been flung thence to the wild breeze.

At last one of her Indian maids, whom she had brought with her, accompanied by Matanko, the Spankaway's cabin-boy, timidly approached her.

"Madam's cabin quarters are prepared for her reception," said the girl, in her soft, broken Indian speech, which there is no attempt to reproduce. "Perhaps madam would like to inspect them?"

The woman started out of her reverie.

"Not just now, Wala," she replied. "Ask Captain Bobstay to come to me."

CHAPTER XXVI.

SOUTHWARD HO!

"Oh, my friend!" exclaimed Marion, when she was alone there at the taffrail with the young commander at her side; "with what different emotions from now did I kneel with you on that ancient roof, under that new, fair banner, not so very long ago, when you were about starting on your first cruise in this gallant craft!"

He looked at her in some surprise, for it was evident that she was in one of her despondent moods.

"I can well understand that, Marion," he replied, cheerfully. "But it seems to me that your emotions ought to be happier and more hopeful now than then."

"Why do you think so, my son?"

"Why, then all was uncertain and untried, while now the privateer is weighed in the balance and found not wanting! She is already a terror for the British marine, and not the least of the inspiring beacons for our fighters for independence and a national life."

"True; but then I had both my sweet girls, both Aileen and Carletta, with me, my friend, while now?"

The trouble increased on her pure brow.

"Your girls, Marion?"

"Yes; that is,"—she struggled with an unusual embarrassment—"ah, well, is not Aileen my god-daughter, and have I not reason to believe that the no less lovely Carletta is her twin-sister?"

"You may have your own reasons to believe that, Marion," said the young man, searchingly. "But you seem to forget that I am really but little in your confidence, as yet."

"True, true!" and she seemed struggling against a new agitation. "Ah, but the time is not yet for me to speak, my dear friend."

"But why should it not be now, Marion?" exclaimed the young man, with increased earnestness; "now and here at this silent hour, with Heaven and Fate only knowing what new perils by war or wave are mustering to confront us in the near future?"

"No, no; it must not be."

"Strange, incomprehensible being! Yet how can you expect me to sympathize with your unhappiness when its every source remains a mystery to me? Who and what are you, Marion?"

Seeing that she still remained silent, though greatly moved, he continued with increased eagerness:

"Do make me your confidant in full, Marion! It is no idle curiosity that impels me to this urgency. I am devoted to you, and might serve you better, if only informed as to these complicated mysteries of your past."

"Oh, my friend, I believe you! and yet—not now, not now!"

"Nay, now or never is a good old motto, Marion. Make me your friend, indeed. Who

and what was Gascoyne, the Adventurer, whom you so loved? How are these other men of such diverse callings and stations in life—Lord Penrose, the remorseless Redbeard himself, Perez—mingled in your past? And lastly, who and what are Aileen and Carletta, to say nothing of myself? For you know, I, too, have felt that there must be some unknown secret as to my birth, my extraction and the father whom I never knew—whom the good dame, my mother, will never so much as tolerate an allusion to. Be frank with me, Marion; for all this is grown a maddening torture to me, and is daily growing more so."

"Not now, I tell you!"

She was at last looking at him with a recovered composure that somehow for the moment exasperated him.

"Carletta, at least," he exclaimed, "God willing, is one day to be my wife, Marion. I have a right to demand an explanation of the mystery regarding her, at all events, so far as you know it."

"A right, indeed?" with sudden haughtiness.

"Yes," and he looked at her with unabashed inquisitiveness for the time being. "What is it with regard to her, and perhaps also with regard to Aileen, my friend? May you have been a wife and mother in the secret past, which your seeming youth so covers up or forces back, and—these two beautiful girl-waifs be your own daughters, Marion?"

Instantly he was sorry for the unjust exasperation that had prompted the hasty speech.

She started to her feet as if he had stricken her a blow, the rich blood mantling into her marble face, her eyes gloomy and resentful.

"Boy, you forget yourself!" she exclaimed, coldly. "But why should I have expected aught but inconsiderateness, or even cruelty, from even you?"

Disregarding his repentant confusion, she strode away, leaving him unhappy and remorseful.

In a moment, however, she had returned. Her soft, forgiving touch was on his arm, her gentle, womanly gaze fixed upon his shame-stricken face.

"Think no more of it, my son," she murmured. "No, it is neither Aileen nor Carletta whose mystery in connection with me will most concern you. It is yourself."

And then she was gone.

On the morrow of the second day out, after a stiff gale during the night, two sails were sighted in the southeast that gave a promise of proving British storeships, and the privateer headed away for them forthwith.

An hour later Marion came on deck, and seemed disturbed on being informed of the promise of the chase in progress.

"Are we to run down the Red Death in this way?" she asked, with a slight frown.

"My dear Marion," replied Captain Jack, smiling, "we shall do better than I dare anticipate if we succeed in overhauling the pirate in this blind chase this side of San Christophe, which must be her ultimate destination, no less than ours."

"But is it well," she said, "to be thus turned aside from our main quest and vengeance by every chance prize that offers itself?"

"We are first of all a letter-of-marque privateer in our country's service, Marion; our personal vengeance must be subordinate to that. Besides, do you fancy that the Red Death, in her present condition and with but half her ordinary ship's company, will not also turn aside at every chance prize that offers itself?"

"Ah, my son, I had not thought of that." And her face cleared.

"Trust me, my benefactress, for weighing everything with due consideration," continued the young man, gently. "See; here is your own lounging-chair in readiness for you in your favorite spot. And by breakfast-time, we may be able to get up some little excitement for you."

She smilingly took the seat, and then, the nearer of the strangers being by this time within gunshot, a ball was forthwith sent whizzing across her bows from the forward chaser.

This brought her to until the privateer came within hail.

"What ship are you?"

"The store-ship Galway."

"British?"

"Can't you see our flag?"

"That isn't the Union Jack, or anything else."

"Well, it's a sort of neutral flag that we fly on our consort's order."

"What ship is conveying you?"

"H. B. M.'s frigate Bellona."

"Where is she now?"

"Separated from us by last night's gale."

"What is your sister ship yonder?"

"The shore-ship Mersey."

"Stand by to receive our boat! There's nothing neutral about our flag."

And then for the first time, as Captain Jack himself headed the boat's crew that pushed off, the privateer run up the Stars and Stripes at her gall.

The other store-ship had by this time taken warning also, and was lying to, as well as she

could in the heavy sea that was running, a couple of knots away.

The Galway was reported by her master, as the young commander stepped over her rail, to be loaded exclusively with powder for the troops at Charleston.

An examination below speedily confirmed this report. It was a powder-ship and heavily laden at that.

As Jack returned to deck, the master, who was a Canuck, met him with a change of demeanor.

"My friend," he said, in his broad provincial accent, "you'd best be taking yourself off with your privateer."

"Ah, indeed! and why so?"

"Take a squint yonder!" he pointed to a new sail in the northwest. "It is the Bellona!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE POWDER-SHIP.

AFTER taking a long look at the approaching vessel, and satisfying himself that it was, indeed, a powerful frigate, a sudden thought occurred to the young privateersman.

"Captain," said he, quietly, "we are not in any particular need of powder on board the Spankaway."

It was the first time he had vouchsafed to mention the privateer's name, and the Galway's skipper, together with his two mates, at once changed countenance.

"Good Lord!" he exclaimed; "is your schooner that devil of a Spankaway?"

"Nothing else, old fellow! Set your flag of distress flying."

"What for?"

"Do as I order, or I'll have you chucked into the sea."

The order was complied with.

"Out with your boats now!" was the next command; "and upon my schooner with you, every mother's son! Your cabin stores are to my liking, and those shall go with you."

This command was likewise complied with, and the ship was presently deserted, clewed safely up into the wind, her helm lashed down to steady her, and her flag of distress fluttering out.

This was not done, however, before Captain Jack had paid a last visit to her hold, accompanied by one of his men.

The prisoners, besides the skipper and his two mates, included thirteen foremast hands, likewise Canada and New Brunswick men.

Having accomplished this much, the privateer set sail to overhaul the Mersey.

"My friend," observed Marion, when the situation had been partly explained to her by Jack, "why do you leave the captured vessel in that condition?"

"As a decoy for the frigate's curiosity," was the smiling reply. "My dear Marion, I promised you a sensation, and you shall have it."

The Mersey, on being boarded, proved to be a valuable prize, deeply loaded with provisions.

Her crew were summarily transferred to the privateer, after which breakfast was had, and the Spankaway leisurely lay to with her prize, while the frigate was now but six miles away, the wind and sea having both quieted considerably.

Later on, she was seen to have run close up to the abandoned powder-ship, as if greatly puzzled.

"It's about the notch of time," observed Jack, consulting his time-piece.

"Time for what?" demanded Marion, who had resumed her place on the quarter-deck.

"For the slow match to be burnt up to the hub that I prepared."

"What! on the powder-ship?"

"Yes; wait. Ah, the frigate has already laid her close aboard, just as I expected. Curse that match! I thought I had prepared it with exceptional care, and—Ha!"

There was a puff, a glare, a tremendous roar, and the powder-ship was perceived blown into blazing fragments, the frigate herself being set on fire on one side by the closeness of her vicinage, and also, to all appearances, not a little racked and shaken fore and aft.

The ruse was a somewhat cruel one, though authorized by the usages of marine warfare, and it had succeeded to a charm.

Marion's face had lighted up, while Jack's was fairly jubilant, as the victorious cheer went up from the privateer.

"What did I promise you?" he cried.

"The sensation which you have given me, my friend," was the smiling response. "Could you but always be equally prompt in your desires, I doubt if there would be much left of King George's navy in the course of a year or two."

The remaining store-ship, the Mersey, was now fired, after which the privateer bore away for the crippled and embarrassed frigate, and was speedily peppering her to her own heart's content.

The Bellona, however, was a powerful fifty-gun ship, of probably six hundred men, which was a little larger game than even the saucy Spankaway was expecting to bag.

After still further crippling the frigate with

a few well-directed shots, the privateer once more resumed her course.

She was all of two months in reaching the tropic seas, and during that time succeeded in capturing or destroying sixteen transports and store-ships, and taking over two hundred prisoners.

The latter were finally transferred to the French man-of-war Nereid, homeward bound from a cruise in the Caribbean, which was fallen in with at last most opportunely, when the privateer was becoming seriously embarrassed by reason of the overcrowding.

A week later on, fifty miles off San Domingo, the booming of heavy guns brought the privateer in the vicinity of a tremendous duel to the death that was in progress between the French frigate Brabazon, on the one hand, and the British sloop-of-war Terror and the armed brig Matchless, on the other.

The Frenchman was fast succumbing when the privateer took a hand by at once engaging the brig on her own account, and thus turning the scale of victory.

Half an hour later the sloop struck her flag to her antagonist, while the brig signaled her new enemy to send boats, as she was in a sinking condition.

The Spankaway's boats, together with those of the sinking war-vessel, succeeded in rescuing such of the officers and crew as had survived the fight.

Directly afterward the unfortunate brig, whose hull had been battered beyond redemption at the water-line, by the Spankaway's undivided attentions, lurched heavily, and then went down by the bows.

The commander of the Brabazon was becomingly grateful, as may be supposed, but the Spankaway only lingered long enough to make over the captives, and then continued on her course.

San Christophe, the island home of the pirate community of which Captain Redbeard was the last of the sea-king chiefs, as you might say, was only vaguely known to Jack as an isolated tropic Eden lying somewhere well outside the Windward chain that forms the eastern demarcation of the Caribbean Sea.

It was now his intention to feel his way in that direction, in the hope of making some capture that would tend to increase his enlightenment as to the geographical mystery.

"If Carletta could only be with us!" he exclaimed, one day, when discussing the subject with Marion. "What a witch of a little navigator she was! I think she would have been able to guide me to San Christophe by a sort of instinct."

"Are you not disappointed," asked Marion, "at not having fallen in with the pirate, or some news of her, before this time?"

"Yes, I confess to that," he replied. "But then, the seas are so wide, and the biggest of ships such an infinitesimal atom among them!"

"Is not San Christophe too strong a place for us to hope to capture it, think you?"

"Probably."

"What, then, is your plan?"

"Circumstances will have to determine that. You see, my friend, I have a pretty good general idea of the island from my many talks with Carletta."

"Tell me what you know, my son."

"The island is small, irregular in shape, and wholly inaccessible on the southern side, save to such as are familiar with certain odd peculiarities of its formation. On this side, also, it is without population."

Here the lookout reported a wreck to the southeast.

It proved to be a dismantled hulk, apparently the result of a comparatively recent cannonade, and smoke was issuing from several portions, as if it might have been fired.

There was no sign of life on board.

At her own request Marion accompanied the second mate when the latter was dispatched to investigate in the jolly-boat.

Sharks teemed around the boat as it approached the wreck, and an appalling sight presented itself on board.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

ON THE PIRATE'S TRACK.

By the name on the bow, and certain of the papers that were found scattered about the rifled cabin, the wreck proved to be the Eleanor, of Perth Amboy.

There were abundant evidences of her having been carried by boarding, after a desperate resistance.

Decks, cabins, gunwales and hatches were smeared with the stans of a slaughter not more than twenty-four hours old. Not a corpse was found, however, and this, together with the multitude of sharks in the vicinity, was sufficient evidence that it was the recent work of pirates.

That these latter were of Redbeard's crew was equally presumable, as none were known as existent in those seas at that period other than of the Red Death's marauders, or from the pirate community of San Christophe.

The wreck had been plundered of pretty much everything of value, and there were yet

further evidences of the recency of the tragedy in the fires that had been kindled in several places, and which had spread with much slowness by reason of the blood-soaked nature of their immediate surroundings.

Presently there was heard the dolorous whining of a dog from somewhere aft, and, on being released from its confinement in one of the cabin lockers, a beautiful spaniel timidly made its appearance on deck, and crouched appealingly at Marion's feet.

She fondled it tenderly, her lovely eyes alternately softening with pathos and kindling with resentment.

"Poor creature!" she murmured; "and art thou the sole dumb witness remaining of this appalling deed? At all events, I will love thee henceforth."

The fires were made surer, and before the return to the privateer was effected, Marion having taken the dog with her, the wreck was enveloped in fast-consuming flames.

This incident was regarded with general encouragement, inasmuch as it was felt that they were now indubitably on the pirate's track.

On the following day a large British West Indian, the *Severn*, containing a valuable cargo of precious woods, indigo and dye stuffs, was captured without a struggle, and was dispatched for Havre, in charge of a prize-crew.

The privateer's position was now to the eastward of Porto Rico, and, to the best of Captain Robstay's judgment, four or five hundred miles to the north-northwest of San Christophe, which was not down on the chart in his possession, as it should have been.

Before dawn of the next day, a light west wind prevailing at the time, there was distinguished the echo of cannonading to the south-east.

The *Spankaway* being already heading in that direction, the echoes grew louder as she proceeded, and by sunrise the lookout reported a sea-fight in progress twenty knots away.

Everything was pressed on, and in the meantime telescopes were in constant requisition.

At last it was made out that a large ship, possibly a frigate, was hotly engaged with two other ships of somewhat lesser size.

Finally, after an exceptionally long examination with the glass, Tom Halyard, who was an expert lookout, turned to the group about him with a satisfied air.

"What do you make of it?" demanded Jack. "A French frigate, beset by a British sloop-of-war and another craft that I can't make out as yet."

He leveled the glass again, and presently cried out, excitedly:

"The other craft tackling the Frenchman is the *Red Death*!"

"What! are you sure?" exclaimed several voices, while Marion, who was standing near, looked up with a flush on her face.

"No doubt of it," after another pause, and still leveling the glass. "Hail there is the sunlight on her topsails, and they are red!"

The wind, fortunately, freshened up steadily, enabling the schooner to wing her way toward the scene of battle with accelerated speed.

When everything was at last plainly visible, the frigate was perceived to be holding her own with no little difficulty against the two-fold attack. The cannonading was incessant, neither of the allies being more than a mile distant from their noble prospective prey, and the latter, while still maneuvering effectively and working both broadsides, already showing signs of being hard pressed.

"The accursed pirate has struck hands with another Britisher," cried Jack, clenching his hands, "and the pair of 'em are doubtless hoping to make short work of the Frenchman. We'll cut in for the sloop-of-war first, inasmuch as she seems to be the more dangerous of the pair."

This plan was carried out, the privateer sweeping in like a cyclone, with the fresh breeze on her port quarter and the Stars and Stripes streaming from her gaff.

Her presence had evidently been remarked long before this by the combatants, and the pirate ship was seen to draw off to leeward, leaving the brunt of the fight with the sloop-of-war, which would originally have been no match for the frigate single-handed, though the latter's comparatively disabled condition, after sustaining the double attack, would now have made the contest about an even thing, leaving the privateer out of consideration.

But it was not the *Spankaway's* habit to remain out of consideration for any great length of time.

"Redbeard's favorite tactics over again!" cried Jack, indignantly. "Having lured the Britisher into his alliance, he is now in readiness to desert her at the critical moment! Wear her in, Halyard, and get in our *Long Tom's* work!"

The privateer's first shot was fired at three miles' range, and it took full effect on the sloop and ships.

After that she was closer in, letting fly with one chaser after the other in rapid succession, and with a fair amount of success, while the

men on board the frigate seemed to freshen up immensely, her broadsides replying to the sloop's fire more slowly, but also with more regularity and better effect.

At last a furious shout was heard to go up from the Britisher, and its cause was apparent at a glance.

Her pirate ally, having indubitably turned tail, was at last sheeting away to the south under everything she could carry.

"Miserable fortune for us!" Marion could not help exclaiming. "The coward flees, and, but for this interruption, we might be straight upon his track."

"Patience, dear friend!" said Captain Jack, genially. "Our detention cannot be for long, and, dastardly cold-blooded as the pirates are in this, they are not cowardly in the main. The *Red Death* is, doubtless, still short-handed, which is some excuse for her choosing prudence as against valor in the present case."

"And both Carletta and Aileen are still in Redbeard's and Lord Penrose's hands!"

"Ah! you would deem me capable of forgetting that for a moment?"

"Oh, no; only your patience is extraordinary, my friend."

"It is so perforce, Marion," replied the young commander, gravely. "Besides, let us not forget that our faithful Pambo is also on board the ship of blood, doubtless in concealment."

"You argue much from that?"

"I do."

"In what way?"

"I do not know. I only know that I feel better to think that he is near our dear ones in their misfortune."

This brief conversation was snatched out of the excitement of the stirring scene in which the privateer was now warmly engaged.

And at this juncture a rousing cheer arose from her deck, which was caught up by those on the frigate, now not more than two miles away, the Britisher being about the same distance from each.

This was the occasion of it:

The sloop-of-war was on the point of letting out her royals, probably with the intention of giving up a fight which was at last proving too much for her, and following her treacherous ally's example by turning tail, when two shots, one from the frigate, the other from the *Spankaway's* bow-gun, struck her mainmast simultaneously, bringing it overboard short off at the deck.

Then the privateer sheered out, letting go with her *Long Tom*, the shot raking the unfortunate Britisher fore and aft; while the Frenchman almost at the same instant poured in the most effective broadside she had yet delivered.

The fight was at an end, the outmatched ship at last striking her flag to the Frenchman.

The latter proved to be the sixty-gun man-of-war Bourbonois, Captain Marrachet, with an original crew of five hundred, about one-fifth of whom were killed or disabled.

Her prize was the sloop-of-war *Blenheim*, thirty guns, Captain Renwood, originally of four hundred men, nearly one-half of whom were slain or wounded.

The pirate had by this time disappeared in the southern horizon.

Directly after the formalities of the surrender were completed, Captain Marrachet came on board the privateer to express his gratitude for the service that had been rendered, and without which he was frank enough to confess his ship would doubtless have been a victim, more probably than a victor.

He was a fiery little martinet who was at once deeply stricken with admiration for the beautiful Marion.

He was especially furious against the pirate, no less than with the defeated Englishman for having joined hands with such an outlaw; and the young commander's romantic story interested him profoundly.

"*Ma foi!*" he exclaimed, "why should we not proceed to the infamous isle forthwith, and wipe it out of existence? Such a deed would redound not only to the glory of France or America alone, but to the advantage of all humanity!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE COMPACT.

"NOTHING would suit us better than such an agreement, *Monsieur le Capitaine!*" cried the young privateersman, enthusiastically. "In fact, we were on our way thither when fortune threw us in your way. But the island is, unfortunately, not down on my chart."

"Perhaps it can be found on those of the French admiralty, which are at your service, monsieur," was the reply. "If madame and yourself will do me the honor to dine with me on board the Bourbonois this evening, we can talk the matter over more thoroughly."

The invitation was accepted, and Captain Marrachet, after impressively kissing the stately Marion's hand, took his leave in a blaze of gold lace and epaulettes.

"So!" exclaimed Jack, when once more alone with his benefactress; "nothing, as you see, has miscarried by our delay upon this occasion, at least, my dear friend."

"It would seem not," she replied, a little absently. "Let us hope for the best."

"But what better luck could have happened to us than this! Surely we could not have hoped to capture San Christophe by assault unaided?"

"What were you hoping to do there then unaided?"

"I should have depended on stratagem."

"And now?"

"Well, it is a pity if we shouldn't be able to make short work of the entire corsair community, with the coöperation of this powerful French frigate. In fact, from what Carletta told me of the defenses of the island, I haven't the least doubt of it."

A distinguished entertainment was awaiting them on board the Bourbonois, where the beauty of Marion created a profound sensation.

At the close of the repast, which was a magnificent official affair, Captain Marrachet conducted his guests into a luxurious little cabin adjoining the main saloon.

Here the island of San Christophe was discovered on his official chart, and, after much discussion, a compact was formally made for the capture or destruction of the pirate stronghold forthwith.

"The accursed isle!" exclaimed the French commander; "too long has it been suffered to exist, a relic of the barbarous, piratical past, no less than a menace to our present civilization. My Government cannot but support me in assisting at its annihilation. The island shall no longer exist as the citadel of crime."

Jack heartily concurred in this sentiment. They then turned to refer something to Marion, who for some moments had not spoken, and were startled at the change that had come over her.

Her wine was untasted, her face wildly agitated, and she was gazing fixedly, as if fascinated, at a painting hung on the opposite wall.

"*Mon Dieu!* but what is the matter, madame?" cried the Frenchman. "You are ill?"

She shook her head.

"That portrait!" she murmured, pointing to the painting with a trembling hand; "is it of a friend of yours, monsieur?"

"Not only of a friend, madame," was the grave reply, "but of an only and younger brother—once the idol of my heart—whom I have long mourned as dead."

"His name, monsieur?"

"His name?" wonderingly. "Gascon Marrachet."

"Ah!" And Marion passed her hand over her eyes in an effort to compose herself.

Here Jack passed around to her side of the table to obtain a better view of the painting in question.

It was the portrait of a singularly handsome young man in the uniform of a cadet in the French royal navy.

"Gascoyne, the Adventurer!" he exclaimed on the instant.

"True, true!" murmured Marion; "and as I first knew him—in his early youth."

"But what can this all mean?" cried Captain Marrachet, altogether mystified. "You both recognize the portrait of my brother? You may then have known him later in life. *Mon Dieu!* can my Gascon be yet alive, then, after these twenty-odd years of silence and mystery?"

Marion had composed herself by a great effort, and she signed Jack to silence.

"We hope that he is, monsieur," she replied. "But first let us be sure that there is no mistake."

"With all my heart, dear lady!"

"Did you never know your brother under the name of Gascoyne?"

"Never!"

"When did you last separate from him?"

"Twenty years ago, directly after his marriage; and he was then but nineteen."

"His marriage! Ah, then you would know something of his bride?"

"I should say so. Wait!"

Captain Marrachet went to an adjoining cabinet, opened a drawer, and returned with a miniature, which he laid before them.

It was that of a beautiful girl, of both Saxon and Spanish characteristics, and whose delicate features at once suggested something vaguely familiar to the young privateer's mind.

"The same, the same!" murmured Marion.

"Monsieur, this young lady was English?"

"She was of a haughty and accursed English family!" assented Captain Marrachet, with some bitterness. "She was the Lady Charlotte Penrose."

"Enough, there can no longer be a doubt. But tell me, monsieur: what do you know of your brother's subsequent history?"

Captain Marrachet resumed his seat, and refilled the glasses.

"My brother and I were the last of the Marrachets," he said. "He was a number of years my junior, and my love for him was both of a paternal and a fraternal nature. One day he astounded me by saying: 'Antoine, I must go away.' 'What do you mean, my child?' I demanded."

"I have secretly married the beautiful English mademoiselle, whose brother is that noble

duelist attached to the British frigate now in the harbor." [This was at Toulon, where we were both stationed at the time, Gascon as a cadet, I as a passed midshipman.] "He has discovered our secret, and has sworn to have my life in consequence. This would not trouble me, but that I am under oath to Charlotte to avoid her brother. In fact, she only consented to our clandestine union on my taking an oath to carry her off into foreign parts, where it would be impossible for her brother's vengeance to pursue me. Therefore I am going away."

"My friends, I shall not dwell upon my grief and astonishment at these disclosures."

"I inquired of Gascon as to his prospects; for, like myself, he was without private fortune. He hoped, he said, to find fighting employment abroad. For the time being, he had chanced to win a large sum at play, and, moreover, Charlotte had her jewels, which were valuable."

"Then I spoke to him, and with no little asperity, on a more delicate subject."

"What," I demanded, "is become of the American young lady, your first and only love of but a few months ago?"

"He turned pale, and then burst into tears. The story he told me was a pathetic one. I have forgotten the name of the American young lady I have referred to. But she was understood to be even more beautiful than Lady Charlotte, besides being rich. She was at that time living with her guardian, a French gentleman, in the vicinity of Toulon. I had never seen her, but had also understood that Lady Charlotte's duelist brother, Lord Arthur Penrose, had likewise been paying assiduous court to her, but with less success than Gascon. The latter's love-missives to the fair American had finally been returned to him unopened, and repeatedly."

"He had repaired to her residence to demand an explanation, but she was gone to Paris with her guardian. His official duties at the naval station forbade his following her thither."

"In the mean time, Gascon had fallen in with the young English lady of title, at that time with her father, the old lord, at the Grand Hotel. You know the old Lapland saw: 'A boy's will is the wind's will.' While perhaps still faithful to his first love, he was none the less fascinated by the youthful Lady Charlotte, and perhaps also prompted powerfully by pique. The clandestine marriage had ensued."

"I tried to dissuade my brother from his proposed self-expatriation, but in vain. Then I demanded to see the bride. He brought her to me—a sentimental and willful beauty, in the glamour of her first love. They left me that miniature which had been finished a short time previous. Yonder picture of Gascon was already in my possession. I again sought to dissuade them from flying, but without result. Then they were gone, and I never saw them more."

CHAPTER XXX.

ON THE FRENCH FRIGATE.

CAPTAIN MARRACHET came to a pause, with undisguised emotion.

"But surely this is not all!" exclaimed Marion. "You have yet a sequel to this moving history, captain."

"No, madame," was his sorrowful reply. "At least, none that could be of further concern to you."

"But you must let me judge of that."

"At your good pleasure then, belle madame!"

"You must have tidings of your brother from time to time after that?"

"Yes, though indefinitely."

"When did you last hear of him?"

"Eighteen or nineteen years ago."

"Where was he then?"

"Leading the life of a rover, perhaps of a pirate."

"And the young wife?"

"She had just died hereabouts in the western tropics somewhere, after giving birth to their first offspring—twins."

"You have heard nothing from your brother since then?"

"Not a word, not a breath!"

"And the American young woman to whom he had proved so false?"

"Not quite that. She shouldn't have flouted him so cruelly, and what will not pique work in a man's heart, with a fresh beauty to back it?"

"Have it so, then. What became of her?"

"She married the Englishman, Lady Charlotte's brother. Poor thing!"

"Was she to be pitied, then?"

"I should say so; or so I was given to understand."

"What was her fate?"

"A mystery, no less than poor Gascon's. There was a child born, and then she vanished—all within a year of her marriage."

"And the English lord, her husband?"

"He honestly grieved, I believe, and is perhaps still in the British naval service."

"Tell me, was there not a strange and sinister man, the friend of both your brother and the Englishman, while they were at Toulon together?"

Captain Marrachet started, and then opened his eyes with renewed surprise.

"Yes, yes; belle madame, how can you know these things?"

"I shall tell you later on, monsieur. But was there such a man?"

"Yes; a Captain Perrier. A sinister man, as you say—adventurer, gambler, foreign spy, or corsair in disguise, none could say."

"And what of him?"

"Ah, he must have vanished some time after my brother did, or perhaps it was before. I do not recollect distinctly."

"My friend, you have listened intently to the story of our young friend, Captain Bobstay, here?"

"Indeed, I have!"

"The two young ladies who are now in the hands of Redbeard, the pirate chief?"

"Yes."

"They are the twin daughters of Gascoyne, the Adventurer, otherwise Gascon Marrachet, your brother."

"Heavens! can this be true?"

"It is the truth. And there is yet more."

"Be explicit, I beg of you, belle madame!"

"Mere mention has been made of the English naval officer who is now in Redbeard's company."

"Yes?"

"That officer is the Lord Penrose of your reminiscences."

"Bless me! but we are in a romance."

"Redbeard himself is Perrier."

"Ah! and my poor Gascon?"

"He is now, doubtless, Redbeard's prisoner on the corsair isle."

"What do you tell me?"

"The truth."

"But how can you know these wonders, belle madame?"

Marion hesitated moodily before she answered.

"I will tell you," she finally said. "Your brother's first love—the young American lady who became Lady Penrose?"

"Yes, yes?"

"You do not recall her family name?"

"No," and the Frenchman placed his finger to his forehead; "it has escaped me."

"Was it not Merrivale?"

"True, true! It recurs to me—Marion Merrivale!"

"Monsieur, I am she."

"You?"

"Yes."

"*Mirabile dictu!*"

"Listen, monsieur. Both your brother and I were victims of a heartless deception on the part of Lord Penrose, assisted by that monster Perrier, or Redbeard."

"Yes?"

"It was through their machinations that Gascon's letters to me had been returned unopened to him. This Marion only discovered when too late—after she had become Lord Arthur's wife."

"Ah, I see!"

"She fled her criminal husband's presence with her child. The latter was speedily as if it had never been. She carried with her likewise into the unknown the remnant of her personal fortune, her good guardian having died shortly after the marriage into which she had been so heartlessly tricked. She became thenceforth the mysterious American recluse, Marion of the Mists, the Maid of Montauk."

"Ah! the correspondent of the Marquis de la Fayette?"

"The same."

"*La belle vierge des brouillards!* And you, madame, are she?"

"Yes. Listen, monsieur. Years ago Gascoyne, my first love, came back to me. It was like the sea giving up its dead. There was a wreck on my wild shore. Its sole survivors were Gascoyne, with one of his infant daughters in his arms, and a younger brother of Redbeard, one Perez, as he calls himself."

"They were escaping from Redbeard's infamous influence, and were desirous of being something better and more honest. At least, Gascoyne was. Perez was so treacherous it was difficult to fathom him."

"Strange as it may seem, it was only as Gascoyne that I had known your brother when he was paying court to me. A boyish romance of his which he had successfully prosecuted, and, either through indifference or otherwise, my false husband had not subsequently undeceived me in that. Neither did Gascoyne now."

"He became one of my wild followers on the stormy Point—the wildest of the wild, the bravest of the brave. His child was given in my charge, and by me transferred to Dame Bobstay, the—mother of our young commander here. The sister twin had been left behind, perforce, with Redbeard, on the pirate isle, where the young mother had breathed her last in bringing them to the light."

"Gascoyne had left me as a loving girl, to find me as a morbid woman. What was wax was hardened to marble. Still our love revived, and after a period I received a report of Lord Arthur having met his death in a duel."

"Gascoyne and I were to be married. The

wedding-feast was even prepared. But on the threshold of our joy Redbeard with his cut-throat sea-horde swooped down upon our sea-beat fastness. They were beaten off, but both Gascoyne and Perez disappeared with them—the former, doubtless, as a prisoner, Perez as a more or less willing captive, or, more likely, as his betrayer."

"As for the rest, including the recent reunion of the twins, Carletta and Aileen, you are already aware of it, if you have listened earnestly to the narrative that Captain Bobstay has given you."

"Yes, yes!" cried Captain Marrachet. "My friends, the capture of the pirate isle thus becomes a personal matter with me, no less than with you. My brother and his children, they must and shall be rescued. There is my hand on it, Captain Bobstay!"

Marion also extended her hand, and the Frenchman pressed it to his lips.

The compact was complete.

A code of private signals was agreed on, and then Marion and Jack returned to the privateer.

The evening of that same day, the Frenchman having dispatched his prize and prisoners for Havre under a strong prize crew, the two vessels, frigate and privateer, set sail for the far south on their combined mission of rescue and revenge.

CHAPTER XXXI.

HEAD WINDS.

On the morrow of the following day, however, the weather had turned threatening, and there were belling head winds, which were not long in developing a storm from the west.

The last signal that was seen on the frigate from the poop-deck of the Spankaway was to the effect: "If we part company, perforce, return to your south course at the earliest opportunity."

This was responded to in kind, and shortly after that the vessels saw no more of each other.

The storm lasted all day and the ensuing night.

Then it abated, the wind shifting to a light one blowing from the northwest, and the privateer was once more alone on the bosom of the deep.

Another day, and then a sail in the southwest, which could scarcely be the Bourbonnois, and which was in fact to be an interruption.

"A brig!" announced Halyard at last, after a long scrutiny through the glass; "and, unless I am greatly at fault, a war-brig, at that."

"Let us hope that it is another Frenchman, then," said Marion.

For the first time during the cruise, Jack secretly echoed a hope that would enable him to avoid further detention; so anxious was he also become at last to hunt the pirate uninterruptedly down into his island fastness.

But the moon was rising with tropic brilliancy, and the vessels were nearing each other so rapidly that this hope was speedily dissipated as the character of the stranger became more apparent.

"A brig-of-war, and British by the cut of her!" was the far-sighted Halyard's final decision.

Yes; a little later on this was patent to the naked eye; and after that the Union Jack could be distinctly descried through the telescope at the stranger's gaff.

"Bear away three points to east," suddenly ordered Jack, turning to the man at the wheel.

"We may give her the go-by in that way."

The order was obeyed, though both mates and several others looked at their young commander in no little astonishment.

A fight with a Britisher of not enormously superior force to be shirked at last, and by the letter-of-marque Spankaway, the witch-terror of the seas!

What could it mean?

Marion, however, had alone turned to Jack to smile her approval.

"I say, Captain Jack!" stammered Pennant; "you're not in earnest, are you?"

"To be sure I am, Paul," was the calm reply.

"Why not?"

"Run away from a Britisher, and a mere war-brig, at that?"

"I don't propose to run away, but merely to avoid a fight for the present."

"Humph! There may be a difference, but I don't see it."

"Perhaps you can see, then, that I am anxious to keep tryst with Captain Marrachet, of the Bourbonnois, and run down the Red Death at San Christophe, or before reaching there, without any further interruption that can be avoided."

Pennant scratched his head, while Halyard also looked grave.

"Of course," interposed Marion. "Fighting Britishers may be had at any time, while the case of Carletta cannot wait."

Pennant shrugged his shoulders.

Even the bait of hurrying on to rescue his own sweetheart was hardly enough to tempt him from the chance of yet another fight with the hated Britisher; and it was easy to see that

Halyard and the majority of the crew were with him.

However, the evasion of the fight, however desirable to both Marion and the young commander, was not to be.

Before midnight, notwithstanding the change in the privateer's course, it became patent to all that the enemy was not to be denied.

She had also changed her own course, with the view of forcing a fight or an unequivocal show of the white feather on the part of her opponent; and, being square-rigged and directly before the wind, which gave her the temporary advantage over the schooner, which was seeking to describe the hypothenuse of a triangle with the wind more than half on her starboard bow, it at last became evident that the latter must either run or fight eventually.

"So be it," growled Captain Jack, after receiving a reluctantly assenting look from Marion, who was still on deck. "What is writ is writ."

The course of the Spankaway was accordingly once more altered, but so as to bring her now around to the south of her antagonist.

"We'll try that fighting-cock's paces on this new tack first," continued the young commander, grimly, "and then play him at long range for a spell, to see what weight of iron he can throw."

A cheer went up from the crew as soon as the change of intention was noised along the deck, and a better general spirit seemed to prevail at once.

"We've trusted in fate before, and with no cause to regret it," observed Marion, self-consoling. "Let us see if we may not do so confidently again. At all events, the Spankaway must never turn tail to a foe man of less than double her own strength."

She then went below, after receiving an assurance from Jack that, in all probability, the actual duel would not begin before the break of day.

The first boom from the Spankaway's stern-chaser brought her again on deck a few minutes before sunrise, after a brief and troubled rest.

The vessels were about five miles apart, and the privateer, having let off her Long Tom as a range-feeler, was paying off to the south, directly away from her adversary, and with all eyes directed on a speck that was rising and vanishing on the surface of the unquiet waters a mile or two away.

"What is it?" she asked, of Jack, who was just lowering his glass from an examination of the object.

"A castaway on a hen-coop, we think," was the reply. "And, in that case, doubtless a man overboard from the brig, since there was a brief but heavy squall that only blew over an hour or two ago. We hope it may prove so, at least."

"Ah! because such a pick-up might give some valuable hints as to the brig's strength, I suppose?"

"That is it."

Marion turned her gaze in the direction of the enemy, which was now, as the sun sprang up over the sea-line, coming about in the wind, and letting go with her bow-gun, whose missile was seen to fall about a mile short.

"A thirty-two-pounder!" observed Jack. "But I doubt if her broadsides are so heavy."

"That is a fine, stanch craft, my friend," commented Marion.

"A better bulldog of her size than we have yet encountered," was the frank admission in response.

"What do you make of her altogether?"

"A splendid war-brig of sixteen, at least, and perhaps twenty, guns."

"Pretty big for the Spankaway; is it not so, my son?"

"Yes, at close quarters, with which we sha'n't oblige her, before pulling a few of her teeth. Fine sailer as she is, the Spankaway is her master in any wind."

At this juncture the speck on the waves had enlarged to considerable distinctness.

It was indubitably a man clinging to a hen-coop, and they could see him signal with his hand.

A boat was lowered and he was picked up, after which the schooner rounded up into the wind, as a step toward making a somewhat more intimate acquaintance with her adversary.

The man was a bluff-looking young seaman, who was but little the worse for his long immersion, having, according to his statement, gone overboard from the brig in the squall of two hours previous.

A lot of raffle had been washed off at the same time, it seemed, including the hen-coop to which he chiefly owed his escape from drowning.

After a stiff glass of grog and some strengthening food in the saloon, he brightened up amazingly.

Moreover, he seemed to view his rescue by an American privateer with unaffected satisfaction.

"What is your name, my man?" was Jack's first query in the regular cross-examination that followed.

"John Stivers, sir," was the prompt response. "You don't seem much put out at finding yourself on an enemy's craft, instead of your own?"

"No Yankee craft is an enemy of mine, your Honor."

"What! were you pressed, then?"

"Yes, sir; six hours before sailing, some eight weeks ago, from New York, my native place."

"What is the brig?"

"The British war-brig *Desolator*, stanch, new, and not long out from the Yarmouth navy yards."

"What is her strength?"

"Eighteen guns—thirty-twos fore and aft, and twenty-fours in broadside—and four hundred men, including one hundred and fifty pressed men, and true Americans, like myself."

"Who commands her?"

The answer was such an astonisher as to seem scarcely credible.

"Captain Reginald Penrose, of the royal navy."

CHAPTER XXXII.

WAR-BRIG VS. PRIVATEER.

WHEN it is stated, as it might have been in an earlier chapter, that the officer mentioned, after becoming Captain Bobstay's prisoner-of-war, as consequence of the surrender and subsequent destruction of the British armed barque *Thunderbolt* in the East Hampton cove, had been made over, together with his fellow-prisoners, to the charge of the citizen authorities, for transfer to the American military authorities at New London or Newport, directly after the battle over the Gardiner's Island treasure, it will be seen that there were grounds enough for the first amazement with which this unexpected response of the castaway from the war brig was received.

"Captain Reginald Penrose!" repeated the Spankaway's skipper, with a stare. "Why it doesn't seem possible!"

"It is true, sir," continued John Stivers, quietly. "And, considering that he is a top-notch British aristocrat, he is a pretty decent sort of a skipper at that. Even the pressed men among his crew don't dislike Captain Penrose personally."

"But, look here; this officer was my prisoner after I knocked the barque under his command to pieces off East Hampton beach."

"As if all America didn't know that, besides the glorious way in which you whipped the Britishers and corsairs out of Gardiner's Bay directly afterward!"

"But how could he have had time to get free, and be down here in the tropics with another ship?"

"Let us see, sir. When, allow me to ask, did you start south in this daisy of a craft yourself?"

"On the morning following the Gardiner's Bay victory."

"But how long ago?"

"Ten weeks, or more."

"And haven't hurried yourself either, I suppose?"

"No; we had fights and made captures by the way."

"That makes it plain enough. Captain Penrose returned to New York, from Newport, through a partial exchange of prisoners, after less than a week's imprisonment. The *Desolator* was almost in readiness for her southern cruise, but minus her captain, who had just died of ship fever. Captain Penrose received the command, and a week later we sailed. Then we have not loitered, having met with no adventure, beyond a slight brush with a French sloop-of-war off Cape Hatteras, during the entire voyage, and here we are at last. There you are, sir."

This explanation was sufficient.

"What is the *Desolator's* final destination?" was Jack's next question.

"It is not generally known, sir," was the reply. "She sailed under sealed instructions, which were only opened off Porto Rico, three or four days ago."

"Is there no general opinion on board as to the nature of those instructions?"

"Yes, sir, there is an impression," hesitatingly.

"What is it?"

"Well, sir, the general opinion is that her orders are for some pirates' island, or some such rendezvous of the bloodthirsty villains whom you whipped out of Gardiner's Bay, and with whom the *Thunderbolt* was acting at the time you sent her to Davy Jones's locker, with a preliminary scorching by way of war-paint."

Captain Bobstay started, and he exchanged a glance with Marion and Halyard, who were likewise present.

"That will do, John Stivers," he said, at length. "What do you say about signing the Spankaway's ship's-papers?"

"Nothing would suit me better, sir," cried the man, eagerly.

"All right. Mr. Halyard will attend to the matter, besides signing you to the watch."

Yet stay!" As Stivers arose to accompany the mate.

"Yes, sir."

"You say that a hundred and fifty of the *Desolator's* crew are American seamen pressed into the king's service?"

"Yes; all of that many."

"In an emergency, might they be depended on to refuse duty, or perhaps to strike a blow for the Stars and Stripes?"

"Yes, sir; I really think they could be depended on for that. All they would want would be organization and some powerful encouragement."

"Thank you; that will do."

Jack turned an inquiring gaze upon Marion when they were alone.

"We have lost nothing in trusting to fate again," she responded, with her grave smile.

"True," he observed. "It is doubtless a lucky chance that threw this castaway into our arms. But what do you think of the general opinion as to this war-brig's destination?"

"I coincide with it."

"So do I."

"Moreover, I am not surprised. Having once joined hands with the pirates against us, why shouldn't they do so again?"

"Oh, there is no disputing that! But this Captain Penrose again being in conjunction with his brother to that end, that is the coincidence that is the more surprising."

"True enough. It is bred in the bone, and blood will tell."

"And yet I made you briefly acquainted with this Captain Reginald Penrose when he was my prisoner."

"You did."

"Didn't it strike you that he was honest in his professed detestation of his brother's confidential relations with Redbeard, and his own previous alliance with the pirates?"

"Yes; he impressed me as being a gentleman. But impressions cannot be depended on. Besides, this officer may still be in alliance with the villains against his inclinations. The fact of his sailing under sealed orders in the first instance would argue that much in his favor. Let us give him the benefit of the doubt in the mean time."

The young commander assented, and then the firing of cannon caused them to hurry once more on deck.

As they stepped upon the poop, a round-shot from the brig, now within four miles' range, fell into the sea a few rods astern.

A shot from the schooner's bow-chaser had touched the enemy about amidships only the instant before.

"We're a little too far in," said Jack to Penman, who was the deck officer in charge. "Keep just out of her reach, and continue to tip her at long range. We can afford to play her at this sort of game all day, if necessary."

"Out it is, Captain Jack!"

The privateer was accordingly rounded away on the wind, the Britisher following tenaciously under a towering press of sail.

Finally, the Long Tom was let go again, but only with the result of another high-spent ball touching the brig's port chains, with but little effect, thus showing that she was keeping her just within range, but no more.

Then the *Desolator* replied with her bow-gun, the bolt once more falling a trifle short.

After a few more similarly idle exchanges, Seth Longman went from the Long Tom to the group with which Marion and Jack was standing, and touched his hat.

"If you please, sir," said he, "this hen-coop chap what we picked up claims to be an expert gunner, and would like to try his luck with the chaser with a half-extra charge. I thought I'd speak to you first before giving him leave."

Jack nodded, and then detained him by a gesture.

"With a half-extra charge, you say?"

"Yes, sir."

"Can the gun stand it?"

"I hope so, sir," with a non-committal grin.

"What else does he offer?"

"To throw red-hot shot on occasion, sir, if we can get a shot-heating furnace."

"There is a shot-heater on board!" broke in Marion, eagerly. "It should be among the stores, for I applied for it in my application to the French admiral, on Monsieur de la Fayette's advice."

"Let him try the extra-charge first," ordered Captain Jack.

The gun was accordingly so charged, Stivers manipulating the business with a rapidity and precision that betokened an expert hand and a cool head.

Then every one but himself gave the piece a wide berth as the castaway knelt at the breech-sight, fuse in hand, waiting the lift of a long sea-swell upon which the schooner was just beginning to rise.

Then away blazed the gun, with an extra resonant and brassy ring in the accompanying explosion.

Then the splinters flew in a great shower from the war-brig's bow, and a tremendous cheer rose from the Spankaway's crew.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

"BY HEAVEN! IT LOOKS LIKE THE HAND OF FATE!"

"By Jupiter!" shouted Jack Bobstay, the telescope still up with which he had followed the fortune of the shot; "if it hasn't hopelessly dismounted her bow-gun, may I be hanged for a fool!"

Seth Longman, after a moment's struggle with a less worthy emotion, had stepped up to the "hen-coop chap," as he had rather contemptuously stigmatized him, and was wringing his hand.

"Mate, you can outshoot me!" he exclaimed, huskily. "It's hard to say, but only the fair thing to you."

"Oh, nonsense!" was the hearty response; "it wasn't my shooting, but the extra charge that did the business. You see, your Honors, and your Ladyship," he went on, turning to the group on the poop-deck, "there's no tellin' what brass metal will do till you take your chances testin' it. Iron can be trusted just so far, in my experience, while there's mighty few ships that get the work out of brass or bronze that's in their gun-metals, through their fear in testin' of 'em to the full. True enough, you never know exactly when they're going to bust—but then you takes your chances and you has your music."

"Well, my man," cried Captain Jack, laughing, "under Mr. Longman's authority there, you can test that gun to its full bent, for all I shall forbid, if you only occasionally repeat the thundering success of this your first shot."

"Thank'ee, sir. And how about the red-hot shot?"

"I have given orders for our shot-roaster to be set up, and you shall be notified as to results in due season. In the mean time, blaze away at your discretion, both of you."

These off-hand instructions were acted upon forthwith.

The brig could now only bring her broadsides to bear (her stern-chaser being temporarily useless by reason of her being the pursuer) while being compelled to yaw every time she did that, and these, being but twenty-four pounders, persistently fell short; while the privateer, by still keeping just within her own range, was enabled to repeat her extra-charged shots at leisure from her terrible Long Tom, but few of them missing of execution.

This species of one-sided running fight was kept up for several hours, with such exasperating effects on board the larger and heavier craft as can be readily imagined.

At last one of these parthian bolts elicited a fresh outburst of enthusiasm from on board the schooner as the foretopmast of the brig was seen to go by the board, thus seriously disabling her freedom of movement for the present.

Then Longman and Stivers ceased their firing, with the notification that the gun was over-hot, and would require a good hour to cool.

"All right!" cried Captain Jack; "there are six toasted thirty-twos in readiness, if you've a mind to try 'em in the bow-gun."

"Yes, sir," replied Stivers, respectfully. "But we'll have to venture a little closer in for that. It will never do to try the extra-charges with the red devils—not even with brass."

The necessary order was given, and the Spankaway came about like a suddenly-curbed race-horse.

Then while they were getting in readiness with the bow-gun, she tacked in until the next broadside from the Desolator kicked up the water only a cable's-length short of its intention.

"That will do!" cried Jack. "Ease her off!"

And then, as the gallant privateer stood almost motionless for the nonce in the teeth of the wind, the bow-gun was fired, and the first of the red devils, as the doughty man of the hen-coop had characterized them, was on its errand of destruction.

There was a flash of splinters on the brig's starboard bow, a lightning-like trail of smoke following the fiery course of the shot raking her deck fore and aft, and then, amid a panic among her men at quarters, there was an expiring crash aft, following on which the companion-way hood was seen bursting into flames.

Another cheer from the privateer, another maneuver followed by a falling back out of the wind's teeth, and then the shot was repeated with almost equal success.

This continued at regular intervals as long as the hot ones lasted, the final one being the most effective of all.

It was distinctly seen to rake the brig's exposed broadside of eight guns somewhat slantingly, smashing the carriages of three and upsetting the fourth, while the next moment there was a slight explosion—probably caused by the ignition of loose cartridges—after which the entire deck amidships was a momentary sheet of flame, through which the sailors could be seen to be running to and fro, like so many fiery imps, with fire-buckets and burdens of wounded men.

"Cut in upon her!" roared Jack, his face flushing with the fierce joy of victorious battle.

"Enough of this far-away business! We'll give 'em a show at closer quarters!"

Another cheer, and then the privateer was gliding up on her port tack with tremendous speed.

The brig saw her own danger, and, the fire being extinguished, tried to go about so as to bring her thus far idle stern thirty-two-pounder into action.

But before this could be done the Spankaway spun around on her adversary's blind side, so to speak, and let go with her own broadside at short-mile range, killing two men, upsetting the brig's stern-gun, and half-finishng the demolition of her poop-deck.

This caused renewed embarrassment to the already sore-tried Britisher, and before he could well recover from it, the Witch of a schooner was once more kicking heels at him, while a fresh extra-charged bolt from the cooled Long Tom knocked his stern-chaser endwise, besides ripping off a long deep stick of the aft side sheathing clear to the stern-post reach.

The brig was now practically helpless and defenseless, so long as her active antagonist could manage to keep on her disabled broadside, and this, in her own unseathed condition, and with her matchless sailing qualities, she had but little trouble in doing.

So after a chiefly running fight that had lasted all of eight hours, the peerless privateer at last ran fearlessly in upon her enemy within easy hail.

Captain Jack raised his hat to the group of officers near the ruins of the war-brig's poop-deck, and there was a stiff response from a stately figure which he recognized as that of Captain Penrose.

"Captain Penrose, my compliments to you!" he shouted, gayly.

The other bowed gravely, while also making a particular obeisance to Marion (whose commanding, white-clad figure was a little back of and apart from the group of which the young commander was the central figure on the schooner's quarter-deck), but he vouchsafed no other reply.

"What do you think of our little Spankaway down in this latitude?" again shouted Jack, this time banteringly enough.

The war-brig's unlucky commander was seen to suddenly start, as one rousing himself out of an evil dream, and then turn to his companion with certain bitter words that were audible even on the privateer.

These were the words: "By heaven! it looks like the hand of Fate!" And they seemed slowly, torturingly wrung from an all-but breaking heart.

In the mean time, the decks of the brig forward and amidships were more or less curtained with the smoke of the recently-extinguished but still smoldering fires, through which the actions of the tars—who appeared to be busy enough at something or other, no longer making any attempt to work the guns—were not distinctly comprehensible.

"Do you surrender?" Jack at length impatiently called out.

For answer, Captain Penrose pointed with a grand gesture to the British Union Jack, rent in twain by a cannot-shot, it is true, but still fluttering its parts defiantly from the brig's gaff.

There was a little too much of this top-lofty style on the part of a thrashed ship's commanding officer for even the privateering digestion.

"Strike your flag, blast your toplights!" roared Captain Jack, at the end of his patience at last: "or say you won't, then, and take the consequences!"

"No, then, we won't!" was suddenly thundered from Penrose's lips, while his apparent grief-stricken calm gave way to an unexpected animation. And turning upon his heel, he yelled out: "Boats out, and boarders to the front!"

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE BRITISHER'S LAST RUSE.

It was the last ruse of a brave but over-matched enemy in his desperate game with Fate.

Instantly the war-brig—or the half-wreck of a war-brig—was all activity, animation and excitement afresh.

Then her four large boats, crammed with boarders armed to the teeth, suddenly burst into view, two round the bow and two round the stern from the opposite and concealed, or wide-awake side of the vessel, and there was a simultaneous rush for the gunwale of the surprised privateer.

To add to the effect of the ruse, two guns on the brig's blind side, which had not been altogether disabled, were somehow got to work again, and began to pour twenty-four-pound round-shot into the schooner's side as fast as four men could keep them going.

"Hurrah!" shouted Captain Penrose, springing upon his ship's gunwale and cheering on his men in the boats with waving sword. "Upon them, my hearties! Battered as we are, we can still outnumber 'em two to one in a hand-to-hand fight. Upon 'em! England and St. George!"

A ringing cheer from the speeding boats was his response.

In a few more vigorous pulls, their inmates would be swarming like tigers up over the low-lying gunwale of the devoted privateer, and Captain Jack, no less than pretty much every one of his ship's company, was still in a momentary stupor of bewilderment, when John Stivers sprung to his side.

"Now is your opportunity, sir!" cried the man, in a hoarse whisper. "The pressed Americans have all been left behind on the brig. Call 'em up in revolt!"

Jack instantly sprung upon the bulwark, and yelled across the narrow interval:

"Americans! victims of the accursed British press-gang! now is your time. You've got the brig's decks at your mercy. Strike for liberty and the Stars and Stripes!"

He waited just long enough to behold a mob-like rush aft on the part of a crowd of heretofore scowling and irresolute men gathered about the brig's fore-castle and midships, in response to his appeal, and then a bullet from one of the oncoming boats pierced the rim of his hat as he jumped down to join Halyard and Pennant in organizing the privateer's crew in a serried line to resist the boarding attack.

But the latter, though duly made, was now but a half-hearted attempt.

Two of the boats had come to an irresolute pause upon their inmates turning their heads to witness the suddenly-inspired rush of the brig's pressed men upon their officers and few remaining loyal tars, while the privateersmen were more than a match for the seventy or eighty sailors who did essay the boarding act.

The latter were hurled back at every point, then Stivers had got to work with one of the broad side-guns, and with such success as to sink one of the outlying boats, and spill its swearing inmates sprawling into the water.

Then half or more of the latter grabbed for gunwales of the remaining outsider; the occupants of the latter, while being peppered with musketry from the privateer, vainly endeavored to beat them off with fists and oars; until finally this boat was capsized, and its inmates in the same pickle as the others.

"We've struck!" was at last shouted over the water-space by Captain Penrose, and in a woefully-different tone from that of his defiance of ten minutes previous.

It was time. The mutineers on board the brig were having everything their own way in the hand-to-hand fight that was in progress.

There was a general cessation of hostilities, and the schooner was laid directly alongside, while Captain Jack, accompanied by his mates, stepped on board the brig to receive the surrender.

"Sir," he observed, as Captain Penrose tendered his sword, "you are a second time my prisoner, but this time I shall accept your sword until you can satisfy me on certain points, which make you appear at present in no enviable light."

Captain Penrose looked surprised and mystified.

"You perhaps refer to this last ruse I attempted, sir," he replied. "But it was not unfair, and seemed the only thing left me between honor and disgrace—the disgrace of a second surrender to a force far inferior to my own."

"You are mistaken, sir; I make no reference to that."

And the young commander turned coldly away.

This was the longest and hardest-fought victory in the Spankaway's unexampled career up to this time.

Her prize was more than trebly her superior in tonnage, guns and men. The enemy's loss in killed and wounded was eighty; that of the privateer, twelve. Moreover, besides half a dozen round-shot holes in her starboard side, which could be easily repaired, the latter was without a mark. The war-brig, on the contrary, was terribly battered, particularly on the starboard side. But she was not leaking and her upper works were virtually uninjured, which would render her transfer to a prize-port an easy matter, without a great amount of immediate repairs.

By daybreak of the following day, she was got in readiness for sailing, and was accordingly sent off under a prize-crew, together with all the prisoners, with the single exception of Captain Penrose, who was retained on board the schooner.

The prize-crew consisted principally of men from among the mutineers, which left still a large addition to the privateer's ship's company on that score.

Soon after the Spankaway had parted company with her prize, Captain Penrose was summoned to the saloon cabin, where, besides Captain Bobstay, Marion and the two mates were waiting to receive him.

"You expressed surprise, sir," said Jack, "at my severe language when I received your sword in token of surrender. I am prepared to explain my change of demeanor toward you."

"Do so, I beg of you, sir!" replied Captain Penrose, eagerly.

"Once before you were my prisoner under similar circumstances. Then, as now, you were acting in league with the pirates, whom you then professed to regard with disgust."

"How do you make out that I am again in forced alliance with them?" demanded the Britisher.

"You sailed under sealed instructions?"

"I did."

"Were not those instructions to the effect that you should proceed to the pirate stronghold of San Christophe, and once more communicate with Captain Redbeard?"

"I decline to answer."

"You are safe in doing so, since you have destroyed the instructions. But will you deny on your honor that such was their nature?"

"Sir, I will not do that."

"Then I shall hold you guilty."

"Guilty of what, sir?"

"Of conspiring with pirates against the commerce and liberties of my country."

"Sir, you are unjust. I was a king's naval officer in pursuit of my duty, no more."

"Then you indirectly acknowledge this infamous alliance of your Government with these blood-stained wretches, as charged?"

Captain Penrose for the first time seemed embarrassed.

"It is not my place to criticise my government, sir," he nevertheless replied, with firmness. "I simply obeyed my orders."

"Come, then, I'll give you a chance for yourself. Were those orders repellent to your own sentiments, as a man of honor?"

"They were—painfully so—on my word!"

"And yet your brother, Lord Arthur Penrose, still remains with the pirates on confidential terms?"

"That is his affair, not mine."

"Allow me, Captain Jack," at this juncture interposed Marion. "But it seems to me that you are pressing Captain Penrose unjustifiably. It is not his fault, but his misfortune, that he is the officer of an infamous Government openly given to practices of shame and dishonor."

Captain Penrose flushed at the sarcasm from such beautiful lips, and at this point Paul Pennant struck the table with his clinched hand.

"Pirates should hang, and so should their sympathizers!" he exclaimed, fiercely. "Therefore this British skipper should hang!"

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE WHITE SIGNAL.

HALYARD smiled at his *confre's* passionate bluntness, while Marion said nothing, and Captain Jack made a deprecating gesture.

"Oh, I know what I am talking about!" continued the second mate, glaring resentfully at Penrose, who remained calm. "If we are privateersmen we are not pirates; and yet I wouldn't give much for the chances of one of our necks if they were at the disposal of a British post-captain. And here is this man confessedly in league with pirates, with the orders of his accursed Government as his sole excuse. Yard-arm on the spot! That is my say."

And then, as he seemed to be in uncongenial company, Paul Pennant angrily withdrew from the conference.

"Of course I am at your mercy," said Captain Penrose. "Do with me as you please."

"Well, you sha'n't be hanged, captain," observed Marion, with her stern smile. "Make yourself easy on that point."

"Madame, you have my gratitude."

"Enough of this!" cried Captain Jack, impatiently. "Sir, for the present you have the freedom of the ship."

This ended the interview, and Marion and the young commander went on deck, leaving the Britisher alone over the wine that had been set out, and, it was to be presumed, in a decidedly unenviable frame of mind.

The Spankaway was once more heading for San Christophe, now, according to the chart as rectified by the one in Captain Marrachet's possession, about a hundred and fifty miles to the southeast.

At sunset of that day a hulk, burned nearly to the water's edge and still smoldering, was passed.

This was accepted as the work of the pirate, and as a sign that he had not quite yet succeeded in making port at San Christophe.

Eager lookout was now constantly kept up for the Bourbons, but as yet there had not been a sign of her since she had parted company with the privateer.

On the morning of the following day, however, upon Marion making her appearance on deck, she found both Jack and Halyard eagerly leveling their glasses at something to the southeast.

"What is it?" she asked. "Scarcely another hencoop castaway, I dare say."

"No," replied Jack, "but still a castaway of some sort, we are thinking. Here, Marion!" he passed her the glass: "take a look for yourself."

"Something white fluttering over the waves," she declared, after obtaining the proper focus.

"That is what we make it to be," said Jack.

"But it may be an ordinary wave-crest, after all."

Marion shook her head, while still leveling the glass.

"It's a signal, a white signal!" she persisted. "And there is something dark underneath it, too. Maybe it is a life-raft."

"No," announced Halyard, lowering his telescope at last. "It is a boat!"

Later on this became unmistakable, and then the telescopes could make out that there were two persons in the boat.

At last the sharp-eyed Halyard exclaimed:

"There are surely two persons, and the one that is fluttering the signal is a woman!"

A woman! They looked at him incredulously. But he gravely nodded, and continued his inspection.

In the mean time the Spankaway was doing well, with a good breeze on her starboard quarter.

Presently the speck was so grown as to be visible with the naked eye.

Then Halyard lowered his telescope, and turned to his companions with a peculiar look.

"You might as well prepare for a surprise, you two, I'm thinking," he observed, lowering his voice.

"What is it?" they demanded.

"One of the castaways is a negro, the other—the one signaling—a young girl!"

"Impossible!"

But it was true.

As the boat was neared it revealed the herculean figure of Pambo, lying helpless, and that of Aileen.

"Oh, Marion—Jack!" cried the latter; "can this indeed be true?" and she burst into joyful tears. "Pambo is wounded. You must be very careful with him."

Paul Pennant was the first to spring into the boat that put off for the castaways.

Pambo was soon made comfortable on board the privateer, while Aileen was wonderingly borne off to the saloon by Marion.

Later on, Jack and both mates were present at the ensuing interview.

"We escaped from the Red Death," were the young girl's first words of explanation. "Carletta is well, but she could not manage it to get away with me."

"When did you effect your escape?" demanded Jack, taking it upon himself to chiefly conduct the inquiry.

"Night before last—just after the pirate had captured and destroyed a French trader, throwing all her people to the sharks. Oh, it was horrible!"

Aileen hid her eyes, and was for some time too agitated to go on.

"How was Pambo wounded?" continued Jack, at last.

"He had to kill three of the watch in order to get away in secrecy," was the reply. "But while doing this he received a terrible wound himself."

"You surely did not put adrift without any immediate chance of being picked up?"

"No, no; we—that is, the pirate ship—were being chased by a large vessel at the time. They thought it to be a French frigate. Anyway, Pambo felt sure that we could be picked up by the pursuing craft. But we were not. It came on to blow. The night passed away without a ship-light to be seen. In the morning we were alone upon the sea. We had provisions and water, but Pambo suffered horribly from his wound. I have done the best I could for him, but that wasn't much. Oh, I can scarcely believe that I am here with you all again!"

"Try to compose yourself, my dear Aileen. Why couldn't Carletta accompany you?"

"She was too closely watched. Lord Penrose's jealousy of her is so great that he will scarcely let her out of his sight."

"His jealousy!" Jack flared up at once. "What! does that scoundrel-aristocrat presume to persecute Carletta with his attentions?"

"As much as she will let him, yes," replied Aileen. "But it made our lot harder for Carletta than for me."

"She was won't to rule Captain Redbeard, though."

"I think the pirate chief must be greatly changed from what he was. He was very moody, drank a great deal, and seemed to be greatly under the influence of Lord Penrose, who also made himself very popular among the crew, in spite of his reserved and lofty ways."

"But what can be the man's motive in thus descending to a constant fraternization with such a ship-load of ruffians? I can't understand it."

"Who was Gascoyne, the Adventurer?" suddenly asked Aileen. "I remember such a man indistinctly as a child. But who and what was he?"

Jack glanced toward Marion of the Mists, who thereupon, with her arm about the young girl, took it upon herself to reply.

"He was the man who saved you from the wreck when you were little more than an infant, my love," she answered, gently. "Why do you ask about him now?"

"I have overheard Lord Penrose and Captain Redbeard mention the name more than once,"

Aileen went on. "I think that Lord Penrose must be very anxious to meet this man, whose whereabouts is known to the pirate chief. This is like enough one of his motives for remaining with the pirates."

Marion's eyes softened, and the yearning, hopeful light that was so rarely seen in her perfect face was visible there now.

Aileen was about to speak again, when she suddenly started back in mingled fright and amazement.

Captain Penrose, doubtless unaware of the saloon being occupied, had carelessly entered, and now stood transfixed in the doorway, returning the girl's stare with a look no less startled and wondering than her own.

"You here, sir?" faltered Aileen. "What can this be? How can it have come about?"

CHAPTER XXXVI.

CAPTAIN PENROSE APPEARS TO BETTER ADVANTAGE.

CAPTAIN PENROSE, though much younger than his titled brother, bore a striking family resemblance to him, which sufficiently accounted for Aileen's momentary bewilderment.

"This is not Lord Arthur Penrose, my dear," interposed Marion, calmly, "but his brother, Captain Reginald Penrose, who chances to be our prisoner-guest at present."

But as for the captain himself, his mystification remained.

"This child, how comes she here?" he murmured, still keeping his eyes upon Aileen's face.

"That you may learn later on, sir," Marion coldly replied. "But that she is substantial enough is hardly an excuse for your staring her out of countenance."

He started, and then bowed to her in no little confusion, after which his eyes seemed to return to the young girl's face involuntarily.

"My lost sister's features!" he faltered, half or wholly to himself. "Her eyes, her expression, everything but the complexion!"

Then, again recovering himself, he muttered a few words of apology, and abruptly quitted the saloon.

The remainder of Aileen's story was then gradually extracted from her, after which she was placed in the care of Marion's maid for further sustenance and a recuperating rest.

Marion and Jack then visited Pambo, to find that his wound had at last been properly dressed, and that he was sleeping soundly, with a fair prospect of a speedy recovery.

Much later in the day, Marion and the young commander being alone in the saloon, the latter said:

"How unfortunate that Carletta could not have come to us with Aileen!"

"My friend," replied Marion, smiling, "you should not make such a distinction, even if the darker twin is your betrothed."

"It really isn't that, Marion," continued Jack, earnestly. "But Carletta is much the more experienced and observant of the pair; she would have ten times as much information to impart to us."

"But really Aileen seems to have told us a great deal. We know that the pirates are still short-handed, and are now chiefly anxious to seek the security of their island retreat for a season of recuperation and rest. Besides, we can infer that the frigate in chase at the time of Aileen's escape must have been the Bourbons, which we should therefore rejoin somewhere in the neighborhood of the island within two or three days, if all continues to go well with us. What more is there we should desire to know?"

"Oh, a good deal more, I'm thinking," rejoined Jack, discontentedly.

"Besides," her eyes brightening, "do we not know now almost to a certainty that Gascoyne must be alive and in some way a prisoner on the island?"

"Ah, but that is just what Carletta would be likely to learn far more than Aileen. However, Pambo may be able to give me some hints when he is able to talk."

"What did you think of Captain Penrose's strange conduct of this morning, my son?"

"Another thing that we must discuss, Marion. I am thinking that we are a little too hard on that gentleman, my friend."

"That remains to be seen."

"Let us discover it, forthwith, then."

"In what way?"

"Marion, he should be informed of his sister's fate and of her children's identity."

"I have been considering that. So be it, then, my son."

The Britisher was accordingly sent for, and briefly made acquainted with the facts as to Lady Charlotte's death and the identity of Aileen and Carletta.

His astonishment can better be imagined than described.

"Though older than my dear sister," he at last explained, "I was but a youth at the time of her elopement with the young French cadet, Gascon Marrachet. My brother always refused to acquaint me with the full particulars of the affair," he continued, somewhat resent-

fully. "However, he had married troubles of his own after that. Poor Charlotte!"

His emotion was genuine, and he continued to express himself in a similar strain of regret.

"So there were twin children, you say, and this beautiful girl is one of them? My nieces—my only sister's children! how my heart yearns toward them! And Gascon, the father, a prisoner on the pirate island? Really, all this is hardly within my comprehension."

"There is yet more for you to know, sir," Marion observed, after the romantic situation had been yet further elucidated by Jack. "Lord Penrose had married troubles of his own, you say?"

"None other than he deserved, though!" exclaimed Captain Penrose, harshly. "His bride left him—disappeared, I have understood. He had won her by some dishonorable deception, it was said; and she would not forgive it."

"You are correctly informed, Captain Penrose. I am his wife."

Then followed the last explanation that was necessary to clear up the Britisher's mystification.

"Look here, my friends," he said, at last, "a proposition occurs to me."

"Let us have it," replied Marion, who was rapidly receiving a better impression of the man.

"In the first place, I presume that Lord Penrose, my brother, is now most probably aware of these strange facts?"

"With all, save as to myself, his wife. Even Redbeard is equally ignorant of that."

"Exactly. Well, now, when we reach the island, should it prove that the pirate ship has succeeded in securing her haven-retreat there, let me be your ambassador to my brother individually."

"To what end?"

"I want to rescue him from these infernal associations, even if the secret inclinations of my Government warrants them in a certain degree."

Marion slowly shook her head.

"We are not at all interested in the rescue of your brother, sir," she coldly replied.

"Ah, I had forgotten that you must still detest him."

Marion gave him one of her inscrutable looks. She could not confess how bitterly she had received the intelligence that her husband was yet alive when her long impression of his death had so rejuvenated her first love for Gascoyne in her suffering heart. This consciousness was now her constant grief, inasmuch as she knew her reunion with Gascoyne, even should it take place, would necessitate their instant separation thereafter in vindication of her womanly honor. And yet she would see him again, he would owe his rescue at least in part to her love and devotion, and, even if she should return to her loneliness and despair, he would once more be free, and with his lovely daughters for his consolation.

"Captain Penrose, I strive to detest none but my country's foes," she at last made reply. "But allow me to ask if you are aware of the probable motive that still retains your brother, Lord Penrose, in his present associations?"

"Doubtless, I should say, to obtain the custody of his nieces."

"But both were in his, or Redbeard's, custody until the other day, when Aileen escaped in company with the negro, Pambo, as has been related to you."

"True; but then I am still more or less bewildered. Why, then, Arthur may not even know of the young ladies' identity as yet!"

"Perhaps not. Redbeard might have some motive for keeping him in ignorance of that. However, it is not likely; though Lord Penrose is represented to be in love with the niece now remaining in his hands."

"Indeed!" And Captain Penrose looked more or less embarrassed.

"Yes; and we have reason to suppose that his real private motive in seeking the pirate island is for the purpose of wreaking his long-deferred vengeance upon Gascoyne, the Adventurer, otherwise Gascon Marrachet."

The Englishman simply threw up his hand in a hopeless gesture.

"I had not thought of that," he exclaimed. "But it would be just like his vindictiveness. I have nothing more to say, of course. Only"—he turned to them in mingled distress and frankness—"I do wish I could help you and the poor dear children, you know!"

Jack sprang to his feet and grasped the Englishman's hand.

"You're an honest, right-feeling gentleman, anyway!" he cried. "There's my hand on it, and we'll trust in your honor, anyway."

Marion likewise gave Captain Penrose her hand, and the interview, unsatisfactory as it had been in many respects, closed with a general sense of improved good-feeling on all hands.

In the evening Jack came to Marion to say that he had conversed with Pambo.

"Pambo has imparted to me," he said, "a valuable secret with regard to the accessibility of San Christophe on its worst side, which may be of immense advantage to us."

Two days later, land came in sight, which

Pambo, who was already convalescent, declared to be San Christophe, and they were presently aware of a cannonade in progress somewhere in its vicinity.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

SAN CHRISTOPHE.

SAN CHRISTOPHE, which has long since become of considerable importance as a civilized community, is a triangular-shaped island of the remote tropic seas, of several hundred square miles in extent.

It is of volcanic character, surrounded by a belt of coral reefs inclosing lagoons.

When first approached, it appears like a grand jumble of verdure-clad mountain-peaks, rising in most instances abruptly from the water, often to the height of many hundreds, and occasionally of thousands, of feet.

Most of the sides are virtually inaccessible from the sea, the only available point being to the east, where the ancient buccaneer or piratical community was chiefly settled, and where the girdling lagoon spreads out into a species of harbor, or roadstead, that is only approachable through a narrow inlet or break in the outer reef, which a large vessel cannot enter without intelligent piloting.

The Spankaway was approaching the island from the north; and as she gradually rounded a rocky promontory to the east the cause of the cannonading was speedily apparent.

The French frigate Bourbonnais was stationed just outside the reef-entrance, engaged in uselessly firing shot and shell at a small fort on the mountain-steep far back of the harbor, the white cottages or cabins of the islanders glistening through the trees on either hand still further up the steep.

The firing ceased, however, soon after Marion and Jack made their appearance on board the frigate, which they did without loss of time.

"Ah, my friends," cried Captain Marrachet, when the first salutations and explanations had been exchanged; "but what would you have us do? The pirate ship has escaped somewhere into the lagoon, I have sent one boat-load of men into the place, but they could not have proceeded a mile without being sunk by the firing from that miserable little fort. And in the mean time one would die of ennui here if he were not hanging away at something."

"But this is useless, monsieur!" cried Jack. "The harbor is, moreover, inaccessible for your ship, at least for the present. And your boats will never be able to enter until the fort is captured by a diversion in the rear."

"Ma foi, my friend! and how is that to be accomplished, when all other sides of the island are also supposed to be inaccessible?"

"That is what I wish to show you, monsieur. Let us go into your cabin and have drawing materials before us."

This being acceded to, the young commander made a rough sketch of the island's outlines, and then indicated a certain point on the western boundary.

"This," said he, "is to all appearances the steepest and most absolutely inaccessible portion of the abrupt mountain-coast."

"I should say so!" cried the Frenchman. "Parbleu! I have sailed all around it since that rascally pirate slipped away from me so cleverly three days ago, and one might as well try to climb a blank house-wall as to hope to reach the island's interior at that point."

"And yet there is a key to doing so, which is in my possession."

"A key?"

"Yes, monsieur; Pambo, the faithful negro, whose story I have just acquainted you with, has given it into my hands."

"And this secret, my friend?"

"Is to first enter into the lagoon, which is not difficult just there."

"So; and then?"

"To dive into the water, and come up inside the mountain-wall, which is a mere shell of wonderful formation, inclosing an inner and partly subterranean lagoon, by which one can climb to a deep secluded valley far above."

"Morbien! I never heard of such a thing before."

"Neither did I."

"But this sounds like a fiction. Do you not agree with me, belle madame?" and the Frenchman turned to Marion.

"I do, indeed," she replied. "It does not seem possible."

"I believe in it, nevertheless," continued Jack, quietly. "Pambo once obtained the secret from an ancient buccaneer, who was at the point of death. It is, indeed, doubtful if any one on the entire island is now acquainted with it."

"Ah, well; we will grant the existence of this wonder," cried Captain Marrachet. "But who will dive under this mountain?"

"Pambo and myself. I have planned the whole thing."

"My friend, the waters thereabouts should swarm with sharks."

"They do; we shall take our chances against them."

The Frenchman's gayety gave place to

seriousness, while a look much akin to terror came into Marion's pure face.

"This must not be," continued the former.

"It is too desperate."

"It must be, monsieur," was the quiet reply. "There is no other way of attacking the pirates in the rear. I have resolved upon it."

"An attack upon their rear by two individuals?"

"There will be many more to make it when those two shall have fairly got to work."

"Ah, well, let us get on by degrees. Should you once reach the 'deep secluded valley,' what are you to find there?"

"Gascon Marrachet, your brother, monsieur, otherwise Gascoyne, the Adventurer."

The Frenchman gave a start of surprise, while Marion also looked up wonderingly, for Jack had thus far kept Pambo's communication from her.

"Good heavens!" cried the little captain; "can you be in earnest, my dear friend?"

"Absolutely so, monsieur."

"Explain, I beg of you!"

"For years, according to Pambo, there has been a rumor among the islanders of a mysterious captive restricted to the seclusion of this valley I speak of. From yet more recent information obtained by the negro, he is certain that this prisoner really exists, and can be none other than Gascoyne."

"Well, well; it seems almost incredible. But suppose that you find my brother in this valley, what then?"

"Gascoyne was a favorite among a large portion of the islanders. Indeed, this was the cause of the original rupture between Redbeard and him, and still instigates the former to persecute his rival in this manner."

"Ah, a house divided against itself?"

"Exactly."

"I begin to understand your project, my friend. Come, then, you must describe it more particularly, and then we can plan together accordingly."

Jack proceeded to do this without delay, and before the interview was finished everything was arranged for concerted action.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE ISLAND'S SECRET.

As Marion and Jack were quitting the frigate on their return to the privateer, they were treated to an unexpected ovation.

The bulwarks and rigging of the great warship were crowded with sailors, waving their tarpaulins and cheering them enthusiastically. Captain Marrachet and his staff of officers, their uniforms ablaze with gold-lace, waved their hands from the spring of the high poop-deck. And even a great salvo was fired in honor of the visit which had just been paid.

The cause of all this was soon made apparent.

The boat's crew had been fraternizing freely with the French tars, and the story of the Spankaway's gallant achievements since parting company with the frigate, notably her capture of the Desolator, had spread accordingly.

A return visit was made by Captain Marrachet to the privateer on the following day; and then on the next day after that the privateer set sail for the opposite side of the island in pursuance of the young commander's novel and daring project for penetrating to the enemy's rear.

"For the first time, my friend," observed Marion, when finally talking over the matter with Jack, "I am filled with a fear that you are undertaking too much—that you may not come back to me out of this dreadful peril you are about to tempt."

"You must not feel thus, my dear friend!" cried Jack Bobstay, gayly. "When have I failed to come smiling out of whatever threatened?"

"True; but this diving under the mountain—it is appalling to think of!"

"All the greater credit in succeeding!"

"Ah, if you do succeed?"

"No croaking, my dear Marion! I can swim and dive like a fish, and Pambo will lead the way."

"But the sharks?"

"The pearl-gatherers take their chances with them; why should not we?"

"Still, I fear—I fear!"

The young commander looked at her in surprise.

"Marion, this is new to you—you are not yourself!" he exclaimed, with earnestness, and he took her hand. "What can it mean?"

The trouble remained in her ordinarily passionless face, and, yet more strangely, the hand in his clasp trembled perceptibly.

"Ah, I do not know!" she murmured, striving ineffectually to compose herself. "But somehow I cannot let you go on this undertaking."

"But you have wished me godspeed on equally desperate ones."

"No; hardly so desperate as this." And then she stole a furtive look at him that was full of a new, strange tenderness.

What could it mean? He remained silent for some moments, more or less embarrassed, contemplating her mysterious loveliness and the novel uneasiness that was in it.

If a startling suspicion possessed him for an instant, suggestive of an undesirable susceptibility on her part, it was abandoned as unworthy of him sooner than it was formed. No; the lost Gascoyne must still be the undivided worship of that lonely and long-suffering heart. Besides, youthful as Marion often appeared, she had seemed thus unalterably from his earliest recollections, and might well—her apparently imperishable beauty and freshness to the contrary notwithstanding—be old enough to be his mother. Why, then, this new tenderness even for him, who was her loved *protégé* from his boyhood?

"Come, now!" he cried, at last, with a freshly assumed gayety as against the mystification that was troubling him; "you must promise me to dissipate these brooding fears, and depend upon my fortunate star now as in the past. Assure me that you will do so, Mamma Marion."

She started, paling at first, and then with the rich blood mantling into her exquisite face, after which, slowly and laboriously it would seem, she was as marble again.

"My friend, my child!" she faltered, "you never addressed me thus before."

"How?" surprisedly, for the innovation had been altogether unpremeditated. "In what way?"

"As your—as Mamma Marion," with another fleeting blush.

"Well, now, that's the truth, isn't it?"

And he laughed in his ingenuous way.

"Why did you say so just now?"

"I really don't know," he answered, a little stupidly; and then, once more impulsively taking her white hand, he raised it reverently to his lips. "But what should there be strange in it?" he exclaimed, fervently. "My friend, my benefactress! have you ever been other than as a second mother—and the very best of mothers—to me?"

"Ah! but what would Dame Bobstay say to that?"

"What, my mother? Well, now," thoughtfully, "I really don't think she would care greatly."

"But why?"

"I don't know. But somehow my love for my mother, as doubtless hers for me, though perhaps not wanting in proper dutifulness on either side, has often occurred to me as not being so ardent and engrossing as it might be—or as I have observed between other mothers and their sons."

This was a life-long truth in the young man's experience, though he had never confessed it before, save to his own puzzled heart.

To his further surprise, Marion abruptly withdrew her hand.

"Go, my friend!" she said, in a low, thrilling voice; "I will try to stifle these apprehensions of mine and bid you godspeed as heretofore."

Then she caught him to her bosom with a strangely-bewildered, yearning look, imprinted a kiss on his forehead and was gone.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

UNDER THE ISLAND-WALL.

It was on the morning of a most brilliant and cloudless day, with just enough air to faintly ripple the long, glassy swells of the tropic seas at calm, when the Spankaway drew into the offing before that loftiest and most inaccessible side of San Christophe that has been particularized.

The belt of coral reef, as far as the eye could reach, showed a fringe of surf where the mighty ocean forever, in tempest or in calm, murmured its mystic secret to the dumb rocks that was uninterrupted save at one point, which marked the narrow passage into the stillness of the intervening lagune.

Entering by this passage, under Pambo's pilotage, the privateer found herself in quiet waters of perhaps an average mile in width, and which fairly teemed with funny inhabitants of every brilliant description imaginable, among which there were large and voracious sharks innumerable.

A lump of salt junk tossed into the water summoned them about the vessel in splashing, struggling and ravenous legions.

Marion, who was on the poop together with Jack and Pambo, shuddered inwardly, but by a great effort maintained her immovability.

The water was so clear that the depths and everything chancing therein were distinctly visible for many fathoms down.

"So much the better!" cried Jack, turning to Marion with an encouraging smile while the schooner was being slowly pulled across the lagune by the aid of sweeps. "You can watch our course for a long way after we shall have dived into the clear deeps."

She turned away without replying, perhaps to hide a suspicious moistening of the eyes.

In addition to the bright-scaled inhabitants of the waters below, birds of various plumage were present in the warm air above.

White-winged gulls or frigate-birds floated lazily near or upon the surface. Parrots, no less than monkeys, could be heard chattering amid the dense forests clothing the adjoining steep; and now and then a blue crane or rosy-

hued flamingo flashed over short intervals of water, to be lost amid the green walls of the shore.

Right in front rose the precipitous, verdant mountain-wall, all but perpendicularly for hundreds of feet, and causing wonder that trees and vines could find a stable foothold upon such sheer steepnesses. A glance up was sufficient to satisfy one that to attempt their ascent, even with the primary possibility of forcing a path through their massed vegetation, would be madness.

The lagune was so deep as to afford no anchorage, even if any were necessary in those reef-locked, hushed and comparatively tideless waters. But at last the schooner was brought to a pause within a short cable's-length of the sheer, silent descent of the mountain-bank into the pellucid wave, which reflected it, the sky and the vessel itself as in a perfect mirror.

Jack and Pambo were by this time ready for their perilous exploration of the subaqueous, under-mountain depths.

Both were naked, save the breeching of duck trousers, secured by a stout belt in which was stuck a keen knife; and each carried a thick staff two feet long, and sharp-pointed at both ends with iron, which had been fashioned under Pambo's special instructions.

At last they leaped upon the gunwale, about amidships, facing the shore, for their plunge.

The entire crew of the privateer were fully alive to the scarcely exemplified nature of the undertaking, and were more or less breathless as one man, most of them being disposed along the side, in readiness to follow with their eyes as far as might be the men's disappearance into the pellucid depths.

Marion also stood close to the gunwale, with her maid at her side, Halyard and Pennant standing a little back.

The two latter could with difficulty mask the intense suspense they were feeling; but Marion had steeled herself for this supreme moment, and was as a statue.

Alleen was not present, having been prevailed upon to remain below; besides being kept in comparative ignorance of what was to be attempted.

"All ready, Marse Jack?" called out the negro, with the most cheerful of business-like airs.

He had entirely recovered from his wound, and stood there like a colossal image in ebony, his woolly head erect, the blackness of his herculean body glistening in the glaring sunshine.

"Wait just a minute, Pambo," replied Jack, who had perhaps detected a lingering weakness under his benefactress's outward immovableness. "Marion, come here and look down first."

His gracefully muscular and athletic figure was as polished ivory, in contrast with the black's, a smile of perfect courage, which was at the same time devoid of bravado, was on his frank, fair face, and he pointed down into the abyss.

"Look, Marion!" he continued, as she reluctantly moved a little nearer, her eyes following the direction of his pointing staff. "Where are your omens of ill now? Not a shark in sight—not one!"

It was true for the time being, at least. Purple mullet, sun-fish, bonitos and flash-backs—brilliantly-scaled, of many varieties, some very large, but none dangerous—disported in myriads amid the blue silence of those crystal deeps. But, for some inexplicable reason, the sharks, that had so domineered therein up to a short time previous, had disappeared. Not one was to be seen.

Marion essayed to smile, but with poor success. There was a world of hushed suffering and anxiety in her lovely face that no one had ever noticed there before.

Still she made an heroic attempt to bear up to the last.

"Ah, that is indeed well!" she assented. "Well, we will then accept this as a good omen, my dear friend. Do not hesitate; you see how brave I am. But—"

She broke off with a sort of wail, as of a breaking heart.

"Oh, I can't, I can't let you go!" she cried, with a choking, tearless sobbing that was pitiful to see. "My Jack, my Jack!"

Her hands were pressed to her heart at first, and then went out to him in a wild, voiceless appeal.

For a moment Jack was all but unmanned, but he pulled himself together with a great effort.

"Marion, my benefactress, be brave!" he cried, falteringly. "What! would you forget Gascoyne?"

The name was as magic to her drooping figure; she straightened up, and was all but her cold, passionless self once more.

Still, there was such pitifulness in the effort that it was Jack's turn to melt, or half-melt.

He sprang to the deck, knelt upon one knee, and, seizing her hand, pressed it to his heart with an eloquence that needed no words.

She merely touched him on the forehead with a soft, caressing touch, and then abruptly withdrew the hand he clasped.

Jack Bobstay sprung beside Pambo on the rail again.

The latter made a gesture of "All ready!" in meaning, and then, joining his hands over his head, with his armed staff between them, shot like a bulky black javelin into the depths.

There was a flash of white in the sunlight, a graceful arched line in the air, and Jack Bobstay had dived after him.

CHAPTER XL.

A DESPERATE ADVENTURER.

SCARCELY, however, had the forms of the two divers plunged into the depths, before there arose from witnesses on the privateer, who were easily looking down after them, a cry of half-suppressed horror.

As if in response to a signal, the entire water was suddenly swarming with sharks again.

They were of many species, from the small but deadly ground-shark to the enormous, scarcely less voracious blue variety, including the terrible hammerhead; and they came darting from every direction until the crystal depths directly below the schooner, far down as the eye could pierce, seemed literally to swarm with them.

However, the glistening black and white figures of the fearless divers seemed to evade the serried and silent devouring rush that was made for them by a sort of magic.

"There!" shouted Halyard at last. "But no; bravely done! bravely done!"

Then there was freer breath.

A monster blue shark had been seen to make a gliding rush at Jack, and to be fought off by the latter's spear-shod stake being thrust in a vertical position between its voracious jaws.

But now the divers were gliding down, down into the steadily-glooming twilight of even those sun-pierced transparent depths.

The last that was clearly noted of them was the gleam of Pambo's knife, probably in defense against some monster's attack.

Then he first, Jack directly following, were seen to make a curve inward against the underwater sheer descent of the mountain-wall, after which they suddenly disappeared, as if into the mouth of a cavern many fathoms down.

The next instant the carcass of a huge hammer-head shark floated to the surface, belly-up and disemboweled by a long, slashing stroke, and was speedily torn to pieces by the monsters that swarmed around it.

Marion had drawn a long breath of temporary relief.

"So far all is well!" she murmured. "Heaven keep them in their need!"

And then, without even a word to her maid, she abruptly went below.

"To pray, I think," Pennant said, to Halyard, in a low voice.

The latter gravely nodded, and then they went slowly aft, while the crew fell to conversing softly in separate groups with bated breaths.

To return to our divers, in whose fortunes the reader is probably chiefly interested just now, Jack, upon following Pambo's lead into the mouth of the sea-buried cave, for the first time since the descent, expert diver that he was, began to experience difficulty with his breath, though the plunge had not as yet lasted more than a minute.

The next moment he was in dense darkness as the roof of the subaqueous arch closed over, or, rather, engulfed him into its mysterious maw.

But he did not forget the instructions which the old black had enjoined upon him in their numerous preliminary talks.

Darting straight in under the mountain, he but once touched the slimy rocks of the over-arching crust, after which he again managed to pursue a lateral, cleaving way through the unknown glooms.

At last, on rising again with an upward curve, there was nothing to hinder, while the depths had perceptibly lightened. Then up, up he swept, until the fish-forms around him grew no less distinct than Pambo's form that was leading the ascent, and at last, with a great sigh of relief, his head emerged over the surface of a secret lake, which seemed inclosed on all sides by immense rocky walls.

"All right, Marse Jack!" shouted Pambo, who was swimming but a few yards ahead. "Straight on to whar dem steps come down; and look out for Marse Shark!"

Jack obeyed, making for the point indicated where a part of the rock wall seemed to descend in a species of rough natural stairway.

At this instant, however, Pambo was seen to be intercepted by a shark, while Jack had just time to grip his pike more securely as two similar monsters of the deep rushed upon him from either side.

Evading the rush of the larger, the young man was lucky enough to thrust his pike upright between the other's gaping jaws, which were thus kept pried open and harmless for the moment, though in doing this he lost possession of the weapon.

However, his knife was speedily in his grasp, and, as he slipped aside from the snapping jaws of the larger—a blue shark of enormous proportions—he succeeded in ripping it from end to

end underneath with a single long sweep of the keen, razor-like blade.

Pambo had also disposed of his single antagonist, a tremendous hammer-head.

Both men managed to crawl out of the water upon the rocks as hundreds of other sharks gathered to feast upon the carcasses of their slain companions.

"We're all hunky now, t'ank de Lor!" cried Pambo, with his unquenchable grin.

And then they looked up and around them.

They were at the edge of a well-like salt-water lake, a dozen or more acres in area, the walled sides of which rose abruptly to a height of several hundred feet.

There were glimpses of blue sky at the top, through masses of overhanging tree tops.

"Yes," responded Jack, slowly recovering his breath in great panting gulps. "So far, so good; and we ought to be able to climb up out of this hole somehow."

"We mus'," was the negro's calm reply. "Dere ain't no two ways 'bout it, Marse Jack."

The latter shuddered slightly. The only other way to choose was the one by which they had come, and the idea of retracing that was, now that the dread passage had been achieved, simply too horrible to think of.

"Pambo!" observed Jack, at last, when he was feeling somewhat rested.

"Well, Marse Jack?" was the reply.

"You have never reached this place before?"

"Nebber befo', Marse Jack."

"How did you, then, manage to lead the way to it so unerringly?"

"Hu, Marse Jack! didn't dat ole pirate what I done tole you ob gib me de secret on him death-bed?"

"But I do not see how you could have retained his directions so accurately all these years."

Pambo scratched his woolly head, and grinned afresh.

"Well, somehow, Marse Jack," he replied, "I doan't nebber drap anything outen dis ole skull what once gits fa'r an' squar' stuck in dere."

"I don't believe you do," and Jack once more cast his eyes upward.

"What are we likely," he asked, "to first find up at the top there, if we succeed in getting to it?"

"But we done got to succeed, Marse Jack! dere ain't no choice."

"Granted, then; but what shall we first emerge upon?"

"Well, Marse Jack, I kin only guess from what I reccomember ob dat ole pirate telling me."

"All right, to the best of your judgment, then?"

"Well, in de fu'st place we'll come out inter a sort ob elewated wood oberlookin' de big walle."

"Ah! where we hope to find Gascoyne?"

"Yes; an' dere we mus' be mighty keeful ob dem fellers on guard."

"What fellows?"

"Dem pirates, or dem island chaps ob some sort."

"What would they be doing at the top of this gulf?"

"Looking arter Marse Gascoyne, I suppose, dat he won't get no chance to eben t'ink ob makin' him escape."

"But if the valley to which he is restricted is so secure in itself, what would be the need of that?"

CHAPTER XLI.

THE MYSTERIOUS VALLEY.

PAMBO shook his head.

"Dunno, Marse Jack," he replied. "Suppose we done go up dere an' take a look aroun'."

"Good enough!" cried Jack. "I'm feeling considerably rested now."

They accordingly commenced their ascent up out of the gulf, or crater, or whatever it might be called.

It was a terribly toilsome task, especially for Jack, on account of the sharp rocks, which wounded his bare feet and all but naked body more or less at almost every step, while Pambo, who seemed to be made of iron, enjoyed a comparative immunity in this respect.

At last Jack was compelled to make a pause on a friendly rock-shelf about half-way to the top, and Pambo kept him company in the reprieve.

"If we could only have worn our shoes and some more clothing!" exclaimed the young commander.

"Yes, Marse Jack, an' brung de Spankaway wid us, too, an' all hands, guns an' pervisions included!" replied Pambo, sarcastically. "Dat would hab been mighty nice, but mebbe a leetle hinderin' by de way."

"But I really don't see what we're going to do among the woods without any clothing, old fellow."

"What's de matter wid gittin' some clothin', den, Marse Jack?"

"How shall we get it?"

"Off ob dead men, perhaps. But let's hurry

up, Marse Jack, an' see ef we can't find some libin' ones fu'st. Time enough to make 'em dead arter dat."

They resumed their ascent, and at last had the satisfaction of climbing over the rim of the crater, to find themselves in the midst of a primeval forest of glorious tropical luxuriance surrounding it on every side.

Then, amid the chattering of innumerable monkeys and parrots, they heard the clash of waters, and, mingling with this, a murmur as of human voices.

Pambo made a sign to his companion, and led the way in a stealthy manner, taking the sounds for his guide.

He clutched his pike in one hand, his knife in the other, while Jack had now only his knife.

They presently came upon two wild-looking men, clad in goatskins and armed with carbines, who were conversing in a rude Spanish *patois* at the foot of a large tree.

They looked like improvised Robinson Crusoes. Their faces betokened viciousness and ferocity, and they also wore rude belts containing pistols and hatchets. One of them was skinning a newly-killed monkey, and both were conversing in loud, unguarded tones.

Suddenly they looked up and discovered the naked men stealthily approaching them.

At first they looked astounded and alarmed, but the next instant they sprung upon the intruders with a fierce shout, firing the carbines, but fortunately in such haste as to do no harm.

Pambo and Jack had closed with them on the instant, seeing that there was nothing else for it.

The former succeeded in knifing his man to death in short order, and then turned his attention to Jack, who was having a death-grapple with the other.

This was speedily ended with the black's assistance, the second man being summarily dispatched.

"What did I done tole you, Marse Jack?" cried Pambo, gleefully. "Here am jes' de dead men we war lookin' fur."

And he straightway began to divest the bodies of their rude clothing.

Jack followed his example, though with many more compunctions; and they were presently clothed in their dead enemies' garments and possessed of their arms and ammunition.

Then Pambo disposed of the bodies by dragging them back through the wood, and throwing them into the crater in the most business-like manner imaginable.

A faint path was discernible near where the struggle had taken place.

Pursuing this, the adventurers presently came to a rough-built hut that had doubtless been the abode of the men who had been killed.

It stood on the brow of a sharp declivity where the forest, at least in its unbroken entirety, seemed to end.

Below and beyond there was spread out a spacious and magnificent valley, or canyon-plain, interspersed with thickets, wolds, little savannas and grassy hillocks, with here and there the flash of a hurrying stream, and all girt in by a belt of precipices that seemed to absolutely shut the lovely spot from all the rest of creation.

Entering the hut, the adventurers found it to contain a couch of leaves, covered over with skins, a couple of three-legged stools, a rude table, littered over with greasy playing-cards and a number of jewels, while there was a rude hearth, with the remains of a recent fire and some primitive cooking utensils. One wall of the interior was hung over with a piece of old, bleached sail, which bore the representation of a ship in charcoal, together with a number of rhymes, in both Spanish and English, that were sufficiently significant of the loneliness and hopes of the late occupants.

"I begin to understand this situation!" cried Jack, at last. "Or I think I do."

"What am yo' impression, Marse Jack?" inquired Pambo, without ceasing his rummagings about the odd corners of the hut.

"That these men were sort of exiles here—perhaps transports from the main pirate community for offenses, and condemned to guard the few approaches to this valley from possible intrusion. Yes; and there ought to be more of them at other points."

Pambo stared and grinned, as if this was a deduction somewhat too profound for his comprehension.

"Am dat so, Marse Jack?" he exclaimed, scratching his head. "Well den dem po' chaps must hab been 'lowed some ob de good t'ings ob life, anyway. How's dis?"

And he drew from a concealed locker, half-underground, in which he had been fumbling, a large dust-covered demijohn, with a little cup attached to it.

He drew the stopper, poured out a cupful of some liquor, and, after smelling of it critically, passed it to his companion with a fresh and yet broader grin.

"Rum, by de holy poker!" he guffawed. "Try a snifter ob de dead men's grog, Marse Jack."

"No, thank you," replied the other, declining the proffered bumper. "I'm not in need of raw spirits just now, my man."

Pambo accordingly quaffed off the cup, and then carefully returned the demijohn to its receptacle.

At this moment there was a distant shout, and they both ran out of the hut, clutching the firearms that had come into their possession.

A small spotted deer was flying across one of the little savannas below the steep.

A moment later the figure of a man, armed with a javelin, was seen darting in pursuit so swiftly that he seemed almost to be winged.

Both animal and hunter disappeared in a thicket before anything very particular could be noted of their aspect.

"Come!" said Jack, at once beginning the descent; "we must have a closer view of that fellow. Convict-guards of the valley would scarcely be armed with a primitive spear, and he, moreover, seemed to me to be almost naked."

CHAPTER XLII.

THE WILD MAN OF THE MYSTERIOUS VALLEY.

PAMBO followed, and, after considerable difficulty, the descent into the mysterious valley was effected.

Another shout in the distance served to guide them afresh, and they headed directly for the thicket in which the fleeting figures had disappeared, after first quenching their thirst at a delightful little brook that brawled along to join a considerably larger stream, which betrayed sparkling glimpses here and there of itself among the hillocks and groves.

Reaching the copse at last, the deer was found dead, with a deep spear-wound in its side.

But of hunter and spear there was no trace, save here and there some light marks on the turf that might have been made by naked feet, together with some slight blood-stains, leading off into the denser parts of the thicket.

"The hunter has doubtless descried our approach, and fled in alarm," cried Jack. "See; thereway he must have gone, dragging his lance after him."

Scarcely had he spoken, when there was a rustling, warning sound.

They just ducked their heads in time for a javelin to whiz over them, and bury itself in an adjoining tree.

Then there was a series of wild, triumphant laughs, dying rapidly away in the distance, as its owner doubtless sped off with scarcely credible speed through the hills and woods.

With some difficulty, Jack extracted the lance from the tree and examined it critically.

It was steel-pointed, but was otherwise apparently of very ancient Indian workmanship.

Then his companion and he mutely interrogated each other with their eyes.

"What you t'ink, Marse Jack?" demanded Pambo.

"I hardly know what to think," was the reply. "Can it be that that wild being is Gascoyne himself, and thus primitively armed?"

"De debbil only knows, Marse Jack! I wish I could hab seen de man's face."

"Well, it seems to me the best thing we can do is to conceal ourselves hereabouts, against he chance of his coming back for his game."

This suggestion was acted upon, but it was not persisted in for a great length of time for several reasons.

In the first place, there seemed to be no immediate prospect of the strange hunter's return; and then the adventurers, after a patient watch of an hour or so, began to feel that they were growing very hungry.

This last consideration outweighed every other one at last.

They accordingly picked up the deer, carried it to the hut on the steep, and the means for making a fire being forthcoming after a brief search, were presently improvising a broiled repast which their appetites rendered sufficiently palatable.

In addition to the venison, wild bananas and plantains were obtained from the adjoining forest, and altogether they made out very comfortably.

The sun being then at its meridian, they rested for several hours, after which they set out to begin a systematic exploration of the valley, with the hut on the high ground as a base for their operations.

Plenty of game, but no human traces, made up the sum of their discoveries, and they made their way back to the hut, not a little disappointed.

They passed the night without mishap, and then, after another venison meal at break of day, they sought to carry out an agreement which they had made with their friends before quitting the privateer.

This was that they should, if possible, reach the top of the mountain overlooking the lagoon, and make some signal of their having reached the interior valley.

"We should have performed this as our first duty," observed Jack, "and perhaps would have done so but for the apparition of that wild man. But let us now relieve the suspense of our friends, if it is practicable."

They accordingly started up the slopes of the mountain to the back of their hut, as being the

one looking seaward toward the point whence they had come.

Even from the valley, this proved to be a very arduous task, the mountain being very abrupt and densely forested.

But they at last reached the summit before noon, and had the satisfaction of perceiving the Spankaway still lying in the lagoon at the bottom of the seaward steep, many thousands of feet below.

Having brought a flint and tinder from the hut, they at once proceeded to build three small fires on the summit.

This was a preconcerted signal to the effect that they had reached the prison-valley, as it might be called, and would signal further progress later on.

Having noticed signs of the signal being understood and appreciated on board the schooner, they were on their way down the mountain when two men, similarly attired and armed as those whom they had killed on the preceding day, suddenly sprung in their path, with their muskets leveled.

Jack, who chanced to be in the advance, seeing that they were surprised, held up his hand, saying:

"What do you demand of us? We mean you no harm."

"Who the deuce are you?" demanded the foremost of the men, in English. "And how did you climb up from the sea?"

"We didn't climb up from the sea at all," Jack explained, "but made our way into the valley by coming underneath the mountain from the lagoon."

"Tell that to the marines!" cried the fellow, incredulously—he was a young fellow of not especially vicious appearance. "You couldn't have done it."

"Don't palaver with 'em!" burst out his companion, an older and very ferocious-looking villain. "You know our orders, and if we don't shoot 'em down without questioning—"

He himself was at this instant shot dead in his tracks by Pambo, who had watched and seized his opportunity; while Jack, springing forward crouchingly, seized the other by the throat, the latter's musket being discharged without effect.

"I give in!" gasped the remaining guard. "It may be to your advantage to let me live."

In a moment he was deprived of his remaining weapons, as a preliminary caution, submitting with a very good grace.

Then, upon being cross-examined, he readily admitted that he was from the pirate community, and, with about a dozen others, was under orders to guard the valley from chance intrusion.

"Who is the wild man of the valley who hunts with javelins down there?" demanded Jack.

"That is Gascoyne," was the reply.

"Do you hold any communication with him?"

"None whatever; it is forbidden."

"Is he the sole prisoner of the valley?"

"Yes."

"Why is he secreted there?"

"I don't know. He has been there for many years, I believe."

"Why is this guard round the valley kept up?"

"Against a possible rescue."

"What! from the sea?"

"No; none is dreamed of from that side; but from his secret friends in San Christophe, I suppose."

"Ah! he has a secret following, then?"

"So I am told."

"Do you think you could help us to communicate with him?"

"I'll do what I can; but he is mighty shy."

They went down in the valley together, the pirate, who said his name was Rashers, further explaining the custom by which the place was guarded round by those who from time to time offended against the rude laws that prevailed in the community.

"I'm not so sorry you killed that chap who was with me," he said at last. "He made me afraid of him, and this wasn't his first sentence to the heights. His name was Crafters, and he was constantly murdering some one or other over card-play. I only wounded one of the head men in self-defense because he objected to my visiting his daughter."

Guided by this man, Rashers, they proceeded to a hollow tree in the valley, where he said the mysterious prisoner was supposed to lurk at times.

There were signs of his having been in the vicinity of the place not a great while before; so the trio, after plucking a quantity of bananas for their refreshment, concealed themselves near at hand and waited.

At the end of an hour's watching there were heard steps approaching, and a moment later the sought-for wild-man made his appearance, unsuspecting of danger.

He carried a large parrot on his shoulder, talking with it now and then, and there was also a freshly-killed rabbit-like animal in his clutch.

This he proceeded to skin and dress for cooking, after seating himself on a mossy bank, with Lisheaf of javelins at his side.

Jack's heart had given a joyful bound, and he thought of Marion.

Gascoyne, the Adventurer, was before him at last.

CHAPTER XLIII.

GASCOYNE.

THE mysterious adventurer was not so disguised by his vast growth of hair and beard but that both Jack and Pambo had recognized him on the instant.

He was naked, except for a sheep-skin breeching, and his naturally fair skin was bronzed to a rich coppery hue. He had evidently developed an extraordinary strength and activity in his enforced savage condition; but he, moreover, appeared scrupulously clean, his language while chatting to the bird on his shoulder was good, though he occasionally hesitated for a word, and the expression of his eyes and face was benevolent and amiable.

But Jack so feared to alarm him afresh, that he hesitated long before deciding upon the best way to introduce himself.

At last he betought himself that his own borrowed attire might be objectionable.

He therefore threw it off, motioned his fellow-watchers to remain in concealment, and then, softly stepping into view, seized Gascoyne's hand.

"Gascoyne, don't you remember me?" he cried. "I'm Jack Bobstay, whom you knew at Montauk as a little boy, and I am come to save you."

The recluse had started to his feet, making a grasp for his weapons, ferocity and alarm in his startled demeanor, but at the words he hesitated, looking at the young man strangely.

"I don't know you," he said, hesitatingly, as if the mere fact of addressing a human being was a marvel to him. "You must go away. No one approaches or speaks to me."

"But you see that I do," continued Jack, with a smile.

"You are one of them?"

"One of whom, Gascoyne?"

"My accursed enemies, the pirates."

"No, no; but I am here to save you from them."

"It cannot be."

"It is true. Gascoyne, do you not recall me?"

"No, no!" passing his hand over his forehead.

"Do you not, then, remember—Marion?"

The wild man started, his whole demeanor changing and softening.

"Marion of the Mists!" he muttered; "Marion the beautiful!"

"Yes, yes; I am freshly from her, Gascoyne, to save and avenge you. Listen to me."

And, drawing the other down again upon the mossy bank, Jack poured into his ears the story of the past and of the present.

Little by little, recollection and interest seemed to awaken in Gascoyne's understanding; and at last he seized the young man in his arms.

"Ah, it all comes back to me!" he exclaimed.

"I am not yet the hopelessly wild thing they would have made of me. Tell me more. Tell me of Marion, tell me of Montauk. This is music to my ears. But let me know how you managed to penetrate to this cliff-girt spot where I have been walled in for years—for so many and many years."

The young man complied, and then brought Pambo and Rashers into view.

The former Gascoyne could also place in his memory now, while the pirate, speaking for himself, was not long in appearing in a better light than at first.

"Gascoyne," he said, "you have still many adherents in San Christophe. With a little preparation, I am sure you could foment a revolt against Redbeard and the island authorities that would destroy them."

"That is just what we want!" cried Jack.

"A French frigate is eager to aid our privateer in an attack from the sea, if the fort at the harbor can be rendered powerless."

The talk was long and earnest, and Gascoyne seemed to become thoroughly rehabilitated.

"Come to my hut with me," he said. "This is but one of my resting-places. At my hut we can have something to eat and drink."

He accordingly seized his bunch of spears, and, in leading the way, started off at such a pace that his companions could not keep up with him.

"Ah, I see how it is," he observed, proceeding more slowly. "I have run down so many wild animals that I suppose it has made me somewhat over active. But I must hasten to be more civilized again. It will never do to be so savage as I have been."

But he, nevertheless, seemed to control his acquired instincts.

As the party came upon the stream that flowed through the valley, for instance—and it was both wide and deep—he mechanically plunged into it and made his way to the opposite side by a few powerful strokes, before he was aware that his companions had so much as hesitated about following his lead.

On another occasion he again forgot himself as a deer started up in their path.

Away he started in pursuit at the same

winged pace which had seemed scarcely credible to Jack and Pambo on the preceding day, and in a few moments had overtaken and slain the fleet animal with apparent ease.

"I believe you could outfoot a greyhound, Gascoyne!" cried Jack, a few minutes later.

"But we robbed you of your game yesterday."

And he related the circumstance, together with their narrow escape from Gascoyne's javelin later on.

"Ah, thank God no harm was done!" replied Gascoyne. "But it was natural that I should have mistaken you for the accursed guards by the sheepskins you were wearing then as now."

Arriving at his hut at last, he proceeded to cook them meat, the same extraordinary swiftness of movement being noticeable in everything he did.

The hut was full of tamed monkeys and parrots, with which the recluse was on such familiar terms as might be expected.

"I should have lost recollection of my powers of speech, most likely," he laughingly said, "but for my having my birds to talk with; and my monkeys are no less dear to me. Come now, we will eat."

During the rude repast, Jack mentioned the demijohn of rum which they had discovered in the hut on the steep.

The lips of Rashers, the young pirate, watered at mention of this, but the recluse waved his hand impatiently.

"I am glad we have not the stuff here with us," he said, gravely. "I have never seen a drop of the accursed alcoholic poison in any form since my captivity in this wild spot, and I never want to again."

Rashers, in giving his account of the prevailing state of affairs in the pirate community, had to say something of his own history.

He had been among the pirates only about two years, having been induced to join one of their minor crews whose vessel had stopped for water at St. Thomas while he was stranded there. This vessel had subsequently been broken up as being unseaworthy, and its crew had since then been living with many others among the stay-at-homes of the island community, chiefly engaged in raising sheep and goats. He had long been desirous of getting away from the island, and represented that many others were similarly disposed, but, being in the minority, never ventured to make such a wish generally known.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE PIRATE COMMUNITY OF SAN CHRISTOPHE.

THE interview was of necessity a long one, as being preparatory of the plot for attacking the pirate fort in the rear, and in the course of it much interesting and curious information with regard to the solitary outlawed community was evolved.

Much of this was furnished from memory by Gascoyne, no less than by the man, Rashers; the former having lived long as a trusted member of the miniature realm in his earlier days before Redbeard's jealousy had driven him to escape northward with one of his twin daughters, Aileen; the other, Carletta, having been retained on the island, as has already been alluded to in the foregoing history.

The community had been founded by the buccaneers early in the seventeenth century, and now numbered upward of five thousand souls. Less than a thousand of the male population lived by piracy, which was, nevertheless, considered the aristocratic vocation, the leader in which, at this time, as formerly, was generally the more or less despotic ruler of the island when at home. But, though outlawed by all the rest of the world, the community was not without certain unwritten laws of its own, or it must have long since fallen into chaos.

There was a council which, during the absence of the pirate chief, regulated affairs by discussion and vote. But its members were little more than his mere creatures, either through fear or inclination, so that he was practically the king of the island. Theft, murder and offenses against morality were rigidly punished by various penalties, some of which furnished a strange anomaly.

Thus, theft alone was punishable with death. All other offenses, including murder, were punishable either by marooning or deportation to the mountainous interior, for various periods at the discretion of the council.

But, strange as it may seem, crimes were of rare occurrence. The last-mentioned penalty was the one most frequently imposed. And, since the secret valley had been selected as the spot for Gascoyne's solitary ostracism, offenders thus deported had been utilized to act as his mountain guards or watchers. They were thus banished in couples, after being provided with guns, ammunition and a few primitive comforts or conveniences, and were under injunctions not to communicate with each other or with the exile of the valley under penalty of death.

It would seem that these injunctions had seldom, if ever, been violated. At all events, Rashers declared that he and his former mate,

Crafters, had been more than a year on their allotted range without communicating with any other pair of guards; and Gascoyne was now for the first time having speech with his fellow-beings since his banishment so many years before.

Rasher had still another year of banishment to serve, by the terms of his penalty.

Gascoyne, on his part, had, after a period of brooding and despair, grown savagely contented with his isolation. Fire-arms had been denied him, probably with the intention that he might starve to death, or pine away, in spite of the tropical fruits with which the forest abounded. But, after making several unsuccessful efforts to escape, he had fortunately chanced upon an ancient burial-cave, containing, among other relics, a vast quantity of the hunting-spears he has been described as using. These he had put into good condition, and, acquiring dexterity in their use, the excitement of the chase had since then been his constant employment; which, together with daily bathing, had developed the extraordinary skill, strength and activity in which he now excelled.

Hope, however, was at last reborn in his heart, and he was now as impatient to help in the overthrow of Redbeard's despotic power as his visitors could wish.

"Oh, to see Marion, the beautiful, and to clasp my dear children once again to my breast!" he exclaimed. "To do this, what will I not venture or brave? My friends!" and by turns he clasped Jack and Pambo in his eager embrace, "show me but the way to this, and I will rush through fire, or stem the seas!"

"There shouldn't be any great trouble about it!" cried Rasher, enthusiastically. "There are, say, twenty pairs of guards at various points around this valley. Some of them will join in our plot, I am confident, and it will be a small matter to surprise and kill the rest. Then there are a dozen or more of your old well-wishers, Gascoyne, whom I can secretly communicate with in a day's time. After that we shall merely have to fall upon and murder as many of the herders, who are among Redbeard's more conspicuous friends, to furnish a general signal of revolt, and all the discontents will flock to us. Huzza! your brother's sailors will see us rushing down upon the fort. A pilot in the mean time will have been smuggled out to her. Both she and the Yankee privateer can come into the harbor-lake one after the other; and if they don't make short work of both the fort and the Red Death, it will be their own fault. Oh, it will be brave work! and after it, then, ho for a free sailor's life without a hangman's noose forever dangling over one's head!"

His reckless face blazed with excitement as he spoke, and there was little reason for doubting the sincerity of his rather new-fledged enthusiasm, however one might differ with him in the summarily bloody methods proposed.

"Let us take a cool counsel in this matter," Jack observed. "And in order to do this, there are sundry points I want to be satisfied on first."

"Dat am de talk, Marso Jack!" interposed the giant negro, emphatically. "You am de Spankaway's skipper, an' dis t'ing is got to be a Spankaway boss-job all froo."

"In the first place," continued the young commander, addressing himself particularly to Gascoyne and Rasher, "how many influential friends in the pirate community do you think can be depended on to take up arms with us at the start?"

Gascoyne mentioned a dozen or more names of those who had formerly been his friends, and Rasher was sure that they were all alive, and still willing to aid in Redbeard's overthrow.

"How long will it take to communicate with these men," was Jack's next query, addressed to Rasher, "and then be in readiness to signal our revolt by moving down in the direction of the fort?"

"Two days, at the furthest," was the prompt reply, "if we set out to pierce through the valley-guards by to-night."

"Good, then!" said Jack. "I must communicate this by some fresh signals to the Spankaway people; and then there shall be no further delay. Come, Gascoyne, you shall go with us; and your first step outside your valley slavery shall be back over on yonder height whence you can see the gallant craft that is to be chiefly instrumental in restoring you to love, to friendship, and to the world."

The erst wild man of the rock-girt valley flushed, and then he seemed to hesitate strangely.

"My valley, my valley!" he murmured; "how have I come to love it! And yet—"

He stamped his foot, and made a sweeping gesture significant of many things.

Then, stepping to the door of his hut—for it was outside of it that most of the discussion had taken place—he tore the rude door from its fastenings, and cast it far out into the brush.

"So be it!" he said. "My monkeys and my parrots—my dear pets—they shall have their liberty to provide for themselves. But I cannot bid them good-by. Come, let us hasten

away while the sun is setting. It must be thus, by trick or stealth, or they will not let me desert them—these my true, my only friends through all these lonely years. Wait!"

He darted back into the hut. There was a great chattering and talking, a medley of parrot and simian voices, and then he reappeared, with a strange emotion visible in his hairy face, and a great sheaf of javelins in his arms.

"No more!" he cried, hurrying away with the others. "Come!"

"There's the musket and ammunition of old Crafters up yonder where his body lies, Gascoyne," suggested Rasher, after they had proceeded a short distance. "You shall once more have a trusty firelock in your hands."

"Not I!" cried the recluse, disdainfully; "at least not while I have these." And he shook one of his spears aloft. "Hail nothing to miss fire in these, I can tell you."

They reached the brow of the sea-fronting cliff by moonlight, and Gascoyne looked for the first time on the Spankaway, sitting graceful and motionless in the calm lagoon at the foot of the tremendous steep.

CHAPTER XLV.

THE SIGNAL-FIRES.

ONE great signal-fire was first built on the height, after which there were kindled two others.

Altogether, these signals meant—"Success; in two days," as had been arranged with the privateer.

There was a brief pause, then return signals in kind twinkled in the schooner's rigging, after which the drum was heard to beat to quarters with a wild joyance in their rattling, and cheer after cheer rose from her peopled deck.

Gascoyne was powerfully agitated.

"My God!" he murmured; "can it be true that I really stand within hail of hope, love and home? I cannot realize it."

"Oh, it is all true, depend upon it, Gascoyne!" cried Jack, embracing him. "Courage, tried heart! and your grasp shall yet close on the longed-for prize."

"Dat am de trufe, bress de Lor!" echoed Pambo, baring his woolly head in the flooding moonlight. "Dere am de ship, an' dese am de signs. 'Glory to God, an' may de good cause win de day.'"

"Let us away, then!" exclaimed the more practical Rasher at this moment. "It's a lucky thing for us that there is an intervening mountain to shut out the glare of these fires from Pirate's Bay. But if we are really to succeed, no more time must be lost."

They still lingered long enough to see the sweeps at work on the privateer, pulling her out of the lagoon, and then hurried away under his guidance.

There was still some doubt as to Rasher's fidelity, but this was not long in being tested and found good.

A tramp of about five miles around the skirting mountain-top, and for the most part of the way through the dim primeval forest, brought them to the next in the cordon of guard-huts.

A call brought the two occupants forth, and these were given to understand the situation with the muzzles of three muskets and a javelin-point leveled at their breasts.

They gave in their adherence at once and with apparent sincerity, since they at once, on preparing to accompany the little band, proceeded to warn them against the guards of the next hut, five miles further around the valley-wall, as being dangerous men not to be lightly trusted with the project on foot.

Accordingly, upon this cabin being approached, at about midnight, all of the party remained back in concealment, while Gascoyne and Rasher alone advanced and called out the inmates—the last-named acting as spokesman.

They responded to the call with but little delay—a brace of as ill-favored cut-throats as had ever cheated a gallows-rope, and both armed and alert.

The intruders, on the contrary, were to all appearances unarmed.

Rasher boldly made the proposition of the impending revolt to them, in such a manner as to convey the impression that he alone was joined with the recluse in the project as yet.

"That be hanged!" growled the foremost of the hutters, while the other also frowned and tightened his grip on his firelock. "A pretty showing you two beggars would make in offering to upset Captain Redbeard and his rule!"

Rasher, with an air of absolute unsuspicion, was proceeding to argue his side of the case when the ruffians suddenly nudged each other, after which they raised their muskets with surprising abruptness, and fired point blank.

But both Rasher and Gascoyne had dropped to their knees in time to avoid the bullets.

Almost at the same instant the former whipped his carbine from behind him, and shot the foremost of the rascals through the breast.

His comrade turned to fly, but had only made two or three bounds away in the moonlight when one of Gascoyne's concealed javelins transfixed him between the shoulders, and he toppled forward on his face in the death-agony.

This incident put the seal upon the trustworthiness of the last two recruits.

After appropriating the fallen men's guns and ammunition, the party proceeded to the next hut, whose inmates fortunately proved to be so far discontented, not only with their present position, but with the state of affairs on the island in general, as to give in their adhesion to the plot in short order.

The little band, now increased to eight in all, continued on their adventurous round, until three more huts had been visited, with the enlisting of all their inmates, six in number, and with but one more cabin to be investigated.

But this cabin, according to the last pair of recruits, contained, besides its regulation couple of transports, six committeemen from the council who were just starting on the round of the guard cabins for the purpose of taking back one man from each to assist in the defense of the harbor from the threatening attack on the part of the French frigate.

These delegates had reached the hut in question the preceding evening, and would be likely to continue on their assigned mission at the break of day.

This, according to the star-signs, would be in less than an hour, and the hut was fully six miles away, so that no time was to be lost.

Rasher still acted as guide, and by very hard tramping the band of fourteen adventurers succeeded in reaching the desired locality within a few minutes of sunrise.

A number of voices were heard in the cabin, and there were other signs that the occupants were astir.

Rasher, according to prearrangement, advanced to the entrance alone, and called out to those within, while his companions disposed of themselves in various hiding-places near at hand.

The eight men came out at once, and Jack from his concealment recognized in one of them none other than Dirkman, Redbeard's ruffianly but capable Welsh first lieutenant, and he turned out to be the chief of the visitors from the harbor.

"Hallo, it's Rasher!" this scoundrel called out, with an oath. "What do you mean by being off your range, you dog? Do you forget the penalty?"

"I forget nothing, Dirkman," replied Rasher, coolly. "But there's a big piece of news for you all, and I am the bearer of it."

"Look to your firelocks!" warned Dirkman, turning to his companions as a first precaution.

"Now, then," again addressing himself to Rasher, "what is your excuse for deserting your range, you blackguard?"

"I bear a message, I tell you."

"Out with it, then!" furiously, and with a torrent of profanity; "or I'll cut your heart out!"

"Gascoyne!"

"Ha! Dare to tell me that he has escaped from the valley, and—"

"He hasn't escaped just yet. Some of the guards have joined him, and they are to lead down a revolt from the mountains. I am sent here to learn if you men will join it, and an answer is waited for."

"Take it—the old one, Blood for Blood!" and with the rapidity of thought the ruffian snatched a pistol from his belt and leveled it.

But swifter even yet was the intervention of a whizzing sound, and his hand dropped to his side with a javelin piercing the wrist.

Then, as if by magic, the concealed conspirators suddenly rose into view, and Dirkman and his seven companions were as suddenly "covered" by thirteen leveled firelocks.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE STANDARD OF REVOLT.

THREE of the surprised men throw down their muskets on the spot, but Dirkman and the remainder rushed upon the leveled guns with the ferocity of wild beasts, and were shot to death without ceremony.

The three captives at once gave in their adherence to the cause of the conspirators.

Two among these were of the delegation from the harbor, and were likewise fresh from the Red Death's cruise, so that they had much valuable information to impart as to the existing state of affairs in the pirate community and on board the ship.

They represented the pirates as having nearly three hundred fighting men, all told, and as feeling somewhat desperate, but also very determined, and tolerably secure in their belief that the narrow entrance to the lagoon harbor could not be forced.

Still, the panic among the women and children of the community was general, and it was suspected that many of the leading planters and stock-raisers would gladly see the island at peace with the civilized world at any cost.

A camp was made at this point, and, after a number of hours spent in rest and recuperation, Rasher was finally dispatched on his secret errand among Gascoyne's ancient adherents, the nearest of whom lived twelve miles away to the east, over a wilderness of broken and comparatively sterile country.

He left with the promise of being back with

his report, if alive and at liberty, by noon of the following day. Then, if all should go well, the march to the harbor should be commenced forthwith, so as to make the rear attack on the pirate fort by soon after sunset of that same day, in accordance with the agreement as indicated to the privateer by the signal-fires.

The suspense with which the return of Rasher was awaited by the little band of conspirators during the ensuing twenty-four hours can be better imagined than described.

But the young ex-pirate did not fail of his appointment.

True to the hour, Rasher put in a reappearance at the camp, haggard and pale from hard tramping and want of sleep, but with the light of success glowing in his reckless face.

"All is well!" he exclaimed, in answer to the flood of questions that was opened upon him. "Don't stop to talk, but come with me at once."

The band obeyed.

After a tedious tramp of eight miles or more, they suddenly came upon a camp of thirty men.

These were recruits under the charge of several old associates of Gascoyne's, and their welcome to the original conspirators was such as might have been hoped for.

"Make no delay!" cried Rasher, feverishly. "Eight miles further on the harbor is in sight, and at that point twenty more good men and true should join with us. Then at dusk we can light our signal-fire for the privateer and frigate to take action, and sweep down on the fort from the mountain-side, doubtless gathering fresh strength at every stride."

A great cheer greeted these inspiring words, and the march was forthwith taken up.

At the point indicated they were joined, not by twenty but by forty new recruits, and it became known that the news of the revolt was already spreading through the community like wildfire.

Here the entire force was hastily organized, with Jack and Gascoyne at its head; the final signal fire was lighted on the steep overlooking the harbor lagoon; and then, as the moon rose with the setting sun, the grand march down the slope in the direction of the fort, two miles distant, was fairly begun.

The standard of revolt was at last firmly raised in the heart of San Christophe, and with flattering promises of success.

Midway of this distance, there was heard the booming of heavy guns from seaward, and then one of the frigate's boats, crowded with French tars, was pulling into the lagoon, doubtless with the intention of tempting the fort's first attention from the water-front.

"How is this?" Jack demanded of Rasher, who was marching at his side. "Will the frigate's other boats follow in, think you?"

"No," was the reply. "The frigate herself will follow in, and after her your privateer."

"What! they have been provided with trustworthy pilots then?"

"Yes; I saw two put off for them in secret last night, and yonder long-boat's entering thus boldly in advance argues that they must have succeeded in reaching their destination."

"And the Red Death, where is she?"

"Over there!" Rasher pointed away off to the extreme south of the lagoon, adding excitedly: "By Heaven! she is being pulled out, too. Well, she'll die game, we can depend on that."

It was true. A dead calm was prevailing everywhere; and the redoubtable pirate ship could now be plainly seen emerging from behind a sharp promontory that had thus far concealed her from view.

She was being pulled by sweeps around in front of the little town, and her decks were seen to be crowded with men—probably the flower of the pirate-fighting force.

Then the fort began to open on the advancing boat.

"Forward!" shouted Jack, and the Gascoyne attacking force, by this time fully a hundred strong, swept on down the steep at a double-quick, in spite of the rough nature of the ground.

Midway to the rear of the fort, however, there was a random shot, and then a serried line of fifty or sixty men rose up behind a hastily-constructed barricade to dispute the descending column's further advance, firing a fairly well directed volley of musketry as they revealed themselves.

"Charge!" roared the young privateersman, heading the onset upon the obstruction; "and no quarter!"

On they went, reserving their fire till almost within arm's-length, Gascoyne in the mean time dealing out his deadly javelins with incredible rapidity and effect, and then for a moment there was a terrific hand-to-hand struggle at the barrier.

CHAPTER XLVII.

TO THE DEATH.

In the midst of the fight, Jack had just shot down a burly ruffian, and the outnumbered pirates were beginning to waver, when he felt a weight on his left arm.

He turned to see Rasher sinking under a stag-

gering blow from a clubbed musket, and had just time to strike down the wielder thereof with his hatchet, when there was a hissing curse in his ear.

He again wheeled to confront the rush of a huge, black-bearded corsair with upraised battle-ax, when the latter also fell dead, his breast transfixed by one of Gascoyne's javelins.

Then there came the hottest of the fray, in which it was doubtful which was the most conspicuous for daring and prowess, Gascoyne himself or the giant black Pambo.

The latter had mounted a portion of the barricade, and, with his last sheaf of spears in his arm, was raining them out right and left with deadly precision than a repeating-rifle could have achieved in like skillful hands, had such a weapon been known to the warfare of that period. Moreover, his appearance—being still all but naked, and with his blonde hair and beard flying wildly about his face—was in itself awe-inspiring in the extreme, and scarcely less an inspiration for his adherents than a terror to his foes.

Pambo, having discarded his musket for a huge battle-ax, or long-handled tomahawk, snatched from the hands of a falling pirate, had already jumped down behind the barricade, and was mowing down the enemy by the swath.

Rasher had just recovered from the crushing blow he had received, and was enabled to reciprocate the service Jack had rendered him, running a thick-set pirate through the midriff with a hastily snatched boarding-pike just as the latter was leveling a pistol at the young commander's head.

Then the stubborn resistance of the enemy suddenly went to pieces like a house of cards, and for a few moments the fight was converted into a slaughter.

In the pause that followed its cessation it was found that not a defender of the barricade was left alive, while sixteen of the assailants had paid for the victory with their lives—there being none wounded, save to the death.

Gascoyne was gravely proceeding from place to place, recovering his javelins, which, in nearly every instance, had to be dragged out of a dead pirate by main force; Pambo was leaning on his ax, his sheep-skin vestment nearly cut away from his body, the blood-stains on whose shining black surface, however, were almost wholly from slaughtered enemies, and Rasher was loyally assisting Jack in reorganizing the men for the assault upon the fort, now less than half a mile away.

In the mean time the scene on the broad, lake-like lagoon, or harbor, and its narrow entrance a mile or so beyond, was exciting in the extreme.

The Red Death was still advancing along the front of the little town under the impulse of her long sweeps, and was already opening with her bow-gun upon the tall prow of the Bourbonois which was just thrusting itself into the lagoon through the difficult street.

There was little doubt that the Spankaway was close behind the frigate.

And the fort was still popping away industriously at the frigate's long-boat, which was seen to have hugged close up against the inner side of the reef in a more or less damaged condition.

The pirate village seemed to be completely deserted, but upon the wooded and rising ground a mile or so to the rear of it, the moon-lighted spaces were seen to be black with an anxiously-gazing crowd, composed apparently, almost exclusively, of women, girls, and children.

At last, and just as the flanking column was re-formed for the final rush upon the fort, the latter opened fire from its rear embankment with a single twenty-four pounder, whose initial shot cut a man completely in two.

"Forward!" roared Jack, waving a cutlass with which he had at last provided himself. "We must carry those works before the Bourbonois opens upon them, or we shall ourselves be targets for her round-shot. Upon them!"

The charge for the remainder of the distance was on a run, and uninterrupted for an instant by a charge of canister that next came tearing its way through the gallant ranks.

The works were reached. The next instant the assailants were swarming over them in a hand-to-hand grapple for the mastery, in comparison with which the struggle at the half-way barricade had been the merest child's play.

But at this supreme moment, the first shell from the frigate's bow-gun came hurtling over the fort.

Jack was half-frenzied.

"We outnumber these villains still!" he roared, springing on the works and cutting a man down, his example being eagerly followed by a dozen or more of his fellow-assailants. "Upon them! fight them out! Their guns are already silenced!"

He was interrupted by a truly novel missile—a pirate's bushy head, just carried off its owner's shoulders by a second shell from the frigate—striking him in the stomach with such force as to double him up like a jack-knife, and tumble him head over heels to the front of the embankment.

He was brought to his senses by something wet fumbling over his face. It was the bloody hand of a fallen pirate already in the death-agony, but still, though blinded with blood, feeling for a chance to deal yet one more desperate blow with his disengaged hand before the last throes carried him off.

Quickly giving the fellow his quietus with a back-handed thrust of his sword, which he had still retained in his grip, Jack staggered to his feet, faint and sick, but quite certain that he was not seriously hurt.

The fight was now being waged altogether inside the fort, and he could hear the din of it.

As he again climbed over the works, he had the satisfaction of seeing his men everywhere pushing the enemy to the wall, while the frigate had ceased firing at the fort altogether.

He once more joined in the fray, and in ten minutes more the fort was in their hands, every one of its ten guns spiked, and every man of its seventy-odd defenders dead.

But of the assailants, not more than forty were left alive, and among the slain was the brave and reckless Rasher.

Jack felt this man's loss keenly, as he had taken a strong and sudden liking to him, and was in secret hopes that an honorable and brilliant career might be in store for him.

The victors now breathed from their labors, and it was a grand and impressive spectacle that was presented to them from the broad, brilliantly moonlighted waters of the lagoon.

Not only the frigate, but the privateer also, had by this time got entirely through the narrow inlet in the reef.

The former was being slowly swung around, preparatory to pouring her broadside into the pirate ship—which was working her own broadside already, and with telling effect, at a short half-mile range—while the Spankaway, answering to the sweeps more readily, was playing out upon the Red Death with her bow-chaser.

Marion's figure could be distinctly made out on the privateer's poop, and she was now and then seen to wave her hand in the direction of the captured fort.

Jack grasped Gascoyne's shoulder and directed his attention to the stately, white-clad form.

"It is Marion!" he whispered; "it is the woman you love, and who loves you! Gascoyne, the bitterness of your past is about to melt in the rainbow of love and joy!"

Gascoyne's wild face lighted up gloriously for an instant; then he shook his head half-hopelessly.

"It cannot be!" he groaned, pointing to the pirate craft. "Look! can I forget what you told me—that her husband, the man who tricked me out of my love and ruined my life, is yonder, and doubtless alive and well?"

"I do not forget that, Gascoyne, but—how long will he remain alive? Come, follow me! See; they are putting off boats from both frigate and privateer. We must join them somehow!"

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE BEGINNING OF THE END.

SAYING this, Jack Bobstay now mustered his men afresh—or what remained of them—and hurried them down to the water's edge, declaring that, if a boat should be obtainable, they must be in at the final struggle on the pirate's decks.

As they reached the water, there was a long, thundering and earth-quaking roar.

It was the first terrible full broadside of the great French battle-ship being hurled at the Red Death, and under cover of which three of her boats, stuffed with fighting Johnny Crapeauds, were now dipping oars in their combined boarding rush upon the pirate ship.

The latter was replying vigorously, but the effect of the volleyed round metal thrown against her was instantly seen to be terrible; and it was evident that she was doomed.

Then there was a cheer as the Spankaway was seen to have been pulled round partly from under the frigate's shelter; her bow-gun was still at work, and Marion was yet more startlingly distinct in the brilliant moonlight, now with Aileen by her side, her arm being protectingly thrown about the young girl.

Again she waved her hand, and they could almost hear her voice.

Then two boats were lowered away and put off from the privateer to take their part in the boarding of the Red Death.

One of them would have approached the little wharf where Jack and his fellow-victors were by this time gathered; but an available craft having just been discovered, the young commander motioned it back.

Five minutes later the fort carts were in their heat, which was also joining in the grim and bristling boarding-attack upon the doomed corsair.

There was a signal from the frigate, which was naturally taking the lead in the fighting, and still belching forth her terrible broadsides as fast as her gunners could serve the dozen or more guns composing it.

In more or less instinctive obedience to this signal, the six boats, including the great yawl containing Jack's shore command, formed in line abreast of one another.

Then every paddle-blade seemed to dip the water at one stroke, and they swept out in the serried rush over the lagoon.

There was a united cry, and the boat next to Jack's—one of the frigate's—went to pieces from a splintering round-shot full in the nose, and its inmates were struggling in the water, with the razor-fins of the sharks cutting this way and that among the bobbing heads, that were being dragged under one by one.

The yawl paused to assist in the rescue of such miseries as could be snatched out of the monsters' jaws, and was then once more in line.

Yet another of the frigate's boats was knocked to bits, with a like tragical result.

But four out of the original six made fast to the Red Death's wounded side at almost the same instant; and then began the tremendous fight for the mastery along the tall starboard side of the hellish craft—the last of the many outputs from the pirate isle, and for so long the remorseless terror of the seas.

The pirates were still two hundred strong, in spite of their decks being already littered with their dead and dying, and they were fighting with the desperation that is without hope, and only intent on destroying to the last before being destroyed.

The tall figures of both Redbeard and Lord Penrose—the latter at one with his blood-stained associates at last—seemed ubiquitous, the one at the bow, the other at the stern, in their animating presence among the defenders.

Then ensued such a scene as could nowhere be possible outside an old-fashioned boarding-fight in the sea-battles of the past.

Men swarmed up the ship's side like monkeys, many of them only to be hurled back, dead or dying, into the boats or into the shark-teeming waves.

It was a writhing, battling pandemonium on the face of a wooden precipice, with apparently nothing but death before and behind, above and below.

In the mean time both frigate and privateer had ceased firing, and were now using their sweeps in pulling up closer to the doomed ship.

But otherwise the spectators on their decks could do nothing but look on at the hand-to-hand struggle for the mastery.

On the privateer's quarter-deck, Aileen had been taken below, but Marion still remained.

"Dear friend!" exclaimed Halyard, approaching her; "do go below. This scene is too terrible for even your iron nerves."

It was perhaps the twentieth time that this or a similar request had been made to her, but she still shook her head.

"Your nerves seem to stand it, Tom," was her low-voiced reply. "And what of those heroes who are actually grappling yonder, while we can but look idly on?"

"You are a woman!"

She shook her head again.

A woman, yes; but what could he, or any one, know of her intense stake in that culminating struggle, as the final and blood-red blossom of her lonely and suffering life?

But still her eyes, though now searching for Jack and now for Gascoyne, the one man of her heart's passionate worship, amid that terrific struggle, were rather oftener fixed with the most tragic solicitude upon the figure of the youth.

At last she breathed a little more freely, and her hands clasped each other tightly.

The shore-boat, with both Jack and Gascoyne still uninjured among its decimated crew, had cast off and was making a feint to retreat, but only to get well under way before pulling around to the port side of the beset ship.

Its action seemed to be scarcely noticed from the bulwarks of the latter.

Then there was a flash of dipping oars, and Marion drew a yet longer breath as the one boat stole out of sight around the beset ship's bows.

"Splendid!" exclaimed Halyard, who was still at Marion's side. "Captain Jack is at last doing what he should have done at the first. In fact, I can't understand why the entire attack should have been made on but one side."

In the mean time, the shore party were well around the ship before their intention was discovered.

Another moment, and their boat was fast on the comparatively undefended side; yet another, and, with Jack and Gascoyne still in the lead, they were swarming up over the long bulwark line.

But the alarm had been given, the deck had hardly been gained before the flanking attack was met by a section of the pirates from the opposite side.

This diversion, however, also enabled the main body of assailants on that side to gain their first real advantage.

Over the rail they came—American, Gaul, nondescript—and then in a twinkling the fight was transferred from the blood-spattered sides to the blood-slippery deck, fore and aft, over its entire length and breadth.

"Blood for blood!" roared the pirate chief, careering here and there in the deadly press, cutlass in one hand, dagger in the other. "Remember, *camarados*, we can die, but we can kill!"

Then there was a hoarse, bewildering cry, distinct above even that pandemonium of shots, curses and cries, and Jack saw the chief stagger back as a terrible figure was springing like a maniac at his throat, in its clutch nothing but the spear-head half of a broken javelin.

Then the pair, Redbeard and Gascoyne, went down together out of sight, rolling over and over in a grapple to the death.

At the same moment the young commander recognized Lord Penrose fighting desperately but a few paces from him.

"False English hound!" he shouted, in a sudden frenzy. "What, a king's officer is a common pirate and throat-cutter at last?"

There was something indescribably mournful in the despairing face of the Englishman as it was turned toward him, but Jack none the less made his individual rush, battle-ax in hand.

CHAPTER XLIX.

THE CLEARING UP.

BUT, fortunately, it was not to be that Jack Bobstay should again engage in a personal struggle with the titled Englishman who had so stained his honor, his profession and his ancient name by this accursed association with the outlawed devils of the sea.

The former's rush was stayed by a slain pirate suddenly falling slantwise across his path, and at the same instant Lord Penrose clasped his hand to his heart and went down, stricken to the death by a random bullet.

Then there was a final to and fro, back and forth, swaying struggle between imperfectly-serried lines, then a mingling of victors with vanquished, a merciless fury of slaughter, in the midst of which Jack slipped in a pool of blood and then went sliding away on his back, losing consciousness for the time being.

When he recovered, the fight was over, the last pirate-defender dead in his tracks or with the sharks, the red deck was won, and a soft hand was on his brow.

He opened his eyes.

Marion was stooping over him, that new, great tenderness once more in her beautiful eyes, and somehow creating the impression it was to remain therein in the future, never to depart.

"Gascoyne—Carletta!" stammered the youth, sitting up. "Ah, Marion, it is you, it is you, dear friend!"

"Hush!" she murmured. "All is well. I cannot see that you are wounded. Try to rise."

He obeyed, staggeringly at first, but quickly recovering steadiness, since it was only the shock of his fall that had caused him to lose consciousness for a space.

"All is well," Marion repeated. "Now, my son, come with me."

He accompanied her over upon the deck of the Spankaway—which had been made fast to the end of the conquered ship, the Bourbonois to the other—and to a cleared space amidships, where a fast-dying man was lying on a rudely improvised pallet.

Jack frowned and started back, for the moribund was Lord Penrose, and the latter's brother was at his side.

"It is your—father, Jack," murmured Marion.

"My father?" faltered the youth.

Captain Penrose silently took him by the hand and led him to Lord Penrose, who was still conscious.

"Jack, my son, farewell!" gasped the latter, seizing the young man's hand with a last effort.

"I now learn this for the first time from my wronged wife yonder. My son, forgive your erring father. This is his retribution. He came here, staining his soul, in search of his lost sister's grave—to make her twin children his own—and he finds when it is too late his own son. Marion, forgive me—your wrongs are avenged at last. Jack, my son, farewell! The—the proofs will be easy; you will inherit my title and estates. See—see to this, Reginald. There—I—"

He was gone, and, still bewildered, Jack could only touch the cold, dead brow after which he rose and confronted Marion, whose arms were opening for his embrace.

"Can't you understand?" said Captain Penrose, in a low voice. "Marion is Lady Penrose, your mother."

Then they were in each other's arms, with a low-voiced, grateful cry.

"And Dame Bobstay?" was one of Jack's first queries when the transports of this revelation had in some measure been mastered.

"Your foster-mother, my darling," was the reply. "Ah, she kept my secret well. You were committed to her care when a babe, directly after my purchase of the Round House at the Point."

"What! and you have denied yourself to me all these years?"

"My son, I forced myself to it; it was necessary in the lonely and perilous career that was before me. All will be explained."

"Carletta, where is she?"

"Come with me. She was sent for, and should have come off from the shore by this time."

She then led him into the saloon, where with a glad cry Carletta sprang forward to meet them both.

Aileen was already in the arms of Paul Penant, who had entered the cabin a few moments before.

The fight in the lagoon had lasted the greater part of the night.

The sun was just rising when the reunited friends stepped out of the cabin, and as they did so a French officer stepped up to them.

"Captain Marrachet's compliments to madame," he said. "And will Madame and Monsieur le Capitaine vouchsafe to accompany me on the Bourbonois?"

Marion paled and then flushed, for she knew that Gascoyne had been carried to the frigate by his brother, Captain Marrachet, directly after the fight.

"Come," she said, turning to the young girls, "you must go with us, for I know that you also must be expected."

Arrived on board the Bourbonois, Captain Marrachet met them alone at the head of his companionway, neither officers nor men being near at hand.

"Madame," said the little captain, gallantly kissing Marion's hand, "there is one in the saloon who is naturally impatient to see you. Come, my little dears," throwing an arm around each one of the young girls, "do you not know that you are my nieces? No? Well, then your own father shall declare the fact to you."

Marion had already fluttered down the steps before them.

As they entered the saloon she was already in Gascoyne's embrace.

A wonderful change had come over the adventurer.

Thanks to his brother's barber and valet, the erstwhile wild-man of the mysterious valley was transformed into the clean-shaven, handsome adventurer of yore, graver and more bronzed, to be sure, but with a loss of little of the old-time dignity and grace which had made him one of Nature's noblemen among his fellows.

A light fatigue uniform had been furnished him, and there was likewise a civilized sword at his side, in lieu of the savage but effective weapon that had so long stood him in such good stead.

Jack, who was still in his ragged sheepskins, besides being as yet stained and unwashed from the desperate fight on the Red Death's deck, was shrinking to one side, not a little abashed, when Captain Marrachet, divining the situation, seized him by one hand, while Carletta grasped the other.

"A brave man should never be ashamed of the stains of honorable conflict, *mon cher!*" cried the little captain, gayly. "And least of all should Lord John Penrose, in this his hour of dear-bought victory and accession to a lofty and ancient name."

Jack Bobstay, as we shall still call him, flushed to the roots of his fair hair.

"I will none of it—I repudiate it now and henceforth forever!" he exclaimed, indignantly. "A true American in heart and feeling I still am, if not by birth, and I shall never be anything else."

Marrachet shrugged his shoulders a little incredulously, but Carletta only drew her lover a little closer to her side by the hand she clasped.

"And I would never have you anything else," she whispered softly. "As my patriot Juan you have won my heart from the first, and as an American patriot it shall remain in your keeping."

Both Marion and Gascoyne had started at the direct allusion to the misguided nobleman's fate, and were now standing apart in no little embarrassment.

"The dead can so readily be forgotten in the living!" said the adventurer, at last, taking the young man's hand. "My friend, let the blighting mysteries of the past be as though they had not been, and be our future henceforth devoted to Free America first, to our loves and our individual happiness afterward."

He then extended his arms to his twin daughters, and they were taken to the bosom of the sire who had suffered so much, and who to them had in the past been so much a mystery, if indeed they had so much as suspected his existence.

CHAPTER L.

LAST WORDS.

THE pirate island was formally taken possession of by Captain Marrachet in the name of the French monarch, much to the satisfaction of such of the strange community as had survived the carnage which had effected the transformation.

A garrison of French marines was left as a post garrison, and a French possession has San Christophe ever since remained.

In the course of years fresh colonists arrived from abroad. The widows and daughters of the dead corsairs were married to the newcomers gradually; peace and prosperity of a permanent character took the place of the pil-

lage and bloodshed which had so long been the island's inheritance; and now, with but few traces of their buccaneering ancestry, the communities occupying it are among the most indolently happy of the tropic seas, and especially famous for the beauty of their women and young girls.

The Bourbonois and the Spankaway remained together at San Christophe for nearly a month.

When they parted company at last, the latter on her return voyage northward, the frigate to resume her cruise westward in the Caribbean, it was with such mutual exchanges of regret and esteem as can be readily imagined, and the privateer bore away with her, as her individual prize, the Red Death.

This was done at the especial request of Captain Marrachet, who rightly considered that to the privateer belonged the chief honor that had resulted in the triumph of their combined operations in this instance, inasmuch as she had pointed the way to it, besides rescuing the frigate from a superior force of the enemy on their first acquaintance.

But Captain Jack had only accepted this generosity on the condition that of the treasure found upon the island, a corresponding larger proportion should be allotted to the Frenchmen as their *pro rata* share.

This had been done, though the amount of concealed treasure accruing as one of the chief fruits of the bloody victory, while considerable, was much less than had been hoped for.

But there was yet another treasure awaiting the Spankaway rovers in the north, it will be remembered, in which outsiders could not by right claim any share.

The bold privateer, however, found it impossible to make the home run direct and uninterrupted. There was much chasing, capturing, and some more hard fighting to be accomplished by the way.

Her good luck remained constant, though, and it was after a voyage of nearly four months that she again sighted Montauk Point, to perceive the Stars and Stripes still floating triumphantly from the top of the mysterious tower on the rock.

She was home again after an unexampled cruise, with four valuable prizes in convoy, besides the erstwhile pirate ship, and with such a reputation as privateer has never attained before or since.

The fame of her deeds was soon ringing through the land, and it was generally agreed that their effects were inspiring and lasting in promoting the Revolutionary struggle which was then in its critical phase on shore.

After the prizes were profitably disposed of, Marion headed a search-party from the privateer, and the last of the Captain Kidd treasure of Gardiner's Island was finally secured.

It amounted, likewise, to something less than had been anticipated; but enough was still remaining, after Marion had discharged her financial obligation to the French Government for furnishing the Spankaway's armament, to considerably increase each share of the privateer's legitimately earned prize-money, while leaving a sufficient residue for the Maid of Montauk's personal comfort.

But, as the Maid of Montauk and the romantic Marion of the Mists, she had no longer any existence after the return from that unexampled cruise.

She retired, with two or three of her Indian maidens, to a small estate in the interior of the island, and there calmly awaited the development of events.

Shortly after this the ancient Round House was knocked to pieces by the guns of a British man-of-war. There was small glory in the achievement, however, inasmuch as the entire Point was already abandoned as being no longer tenable.

A light-house now occupies the site of the old tower, and even the smugglers' cave-fastness, which had been associated therewith, is now only dimly traced amid the vague traditions of that wild and sea-beat locality.

The privateer continued her cruise, under Jack and Gascoyne, with less uniform success until the end of the war, when she was wrecked, though without loss of life, in a violent storm off Block Island.

There were three notable weddings on Long Island in the month following the surrender of Lord Cornwallis at Yorktown.

As a matter of course, the couples were Marion and Gascoyne, Jack Bobstay and Carletta, with Paul Pennant and Aileen making the happy third pair.

The unions were crowned with exceptional felicity, and descendants of all are now living, for the most part honored and respected, in different localities throughout the length and breadth of the great Republic.

Jack remained firm in his resolve to make no claim upon the Penrose title and estates. They finally passed to the descendants of Captain Reginald Penrose, who had returned to England directly after the return of the Spankaway from her most famous tropical cruise, and could never afterward be induced to draw his sword against the American patriots.

There is one character in our story whose fate forever remained a mystery.

That was Perez, the supposed brother of Redbeard. He was not seen in any of the fights at San Christophe, though there were survivors of the pirate community who had seen him come ashore, alive and well, soon after the arrival of the Red Death in the lagoon for the last time. But he had mysteriously disappeared on the eve of the battle, never to be seen or heard of again. Even Redbeard's real family name and nationality were secrets that remained such.

Both he and Perez, however, had been known from their youth on the pirate island as among the most desperate of the desperate, and it was the prevailing impression that they were adventurers of Portuguese half-breed stock.

Dame Bobstay remained with Jack and Carletta after their marriage until her death; as did also the faithful negro Pambo.

The latter after the close of the war married the negress-Indian Tola, who had been Carletta's maid.

They had numerous children; both lived to a great age; and their descendants are still to be found in the vicinity of Riverhead, Southold, Sag Harbor, and other towns at the eastern end of Long Island.

THE END.

Beadle's Half-Dime Library.

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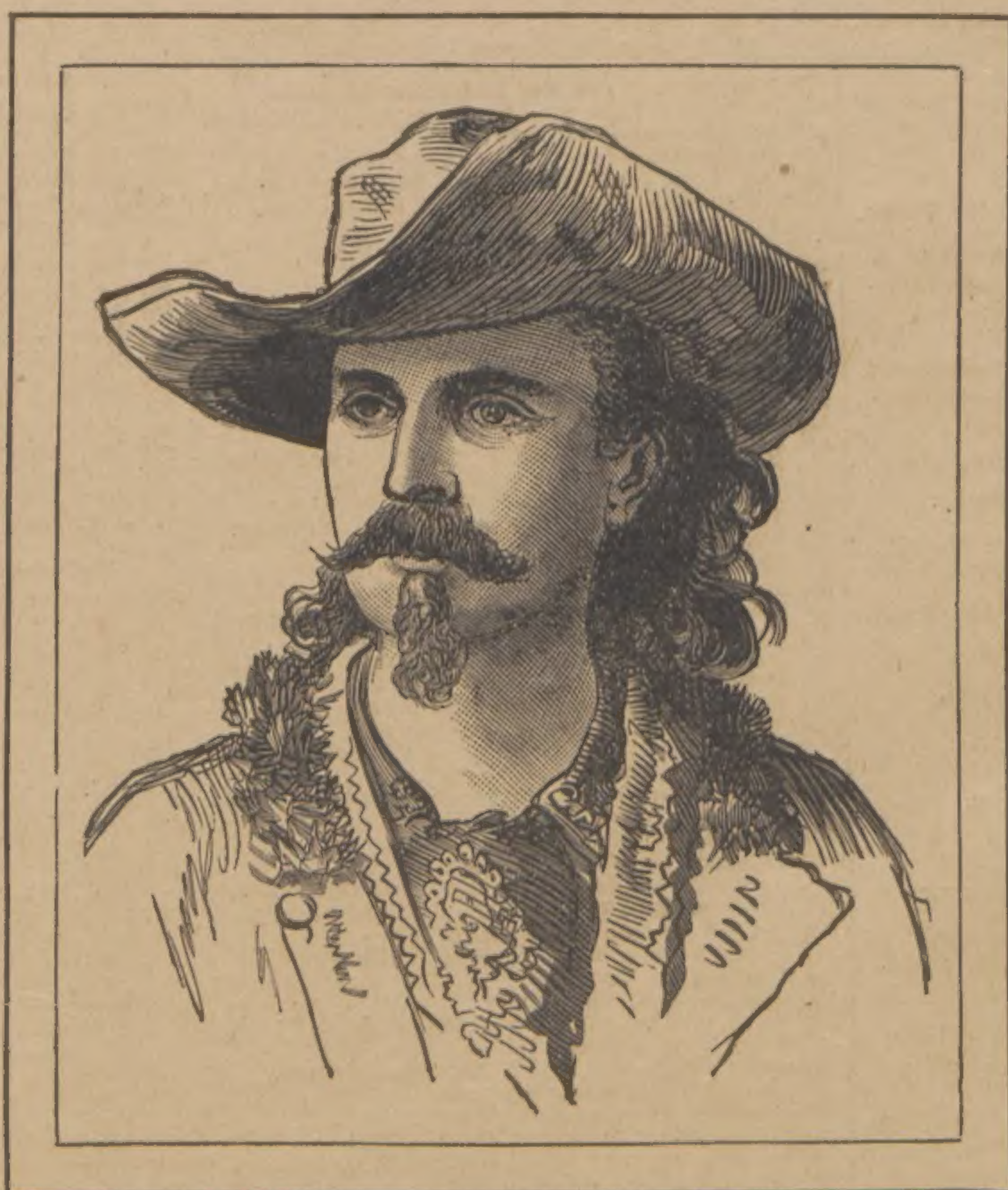
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